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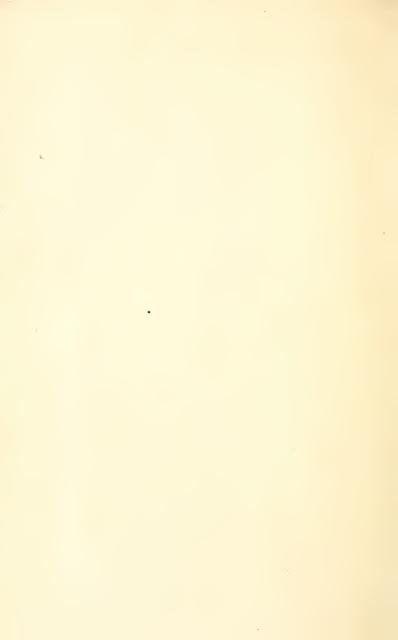
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JAMES VRAILLE:

THE STORY OF A LIFE.



JAMES VRAILLE:

The Story of a Life.

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BY

JEFFERY C. JEFFERY E pseud. =

"Here is a gentleman, whom by chance I met."—Taming of the Shrev.

"Upon whose faith and honour I repose."-The Two Gentlemen of Verona.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

W. H. ALLEN & CO., 13 WATERLOO PLACE,
PALL MALL, S.W.

1890.

LONDON:
PRINTED BY WILLIAM CLOWES AND SONS, LIMITED,
STAMFORD STREET AND CHARING CROSS.

This Book is Dedicated to

ONE WHO WAS THE INSPIRER, AND IN PART THE AUTHOR, OF ALL THAT IS BEST IN IT; WHO RARELY GOT CREDIT FOR WHAT HE HAD DONE, NEVER TOOK IT FOR WHAT HE HAD NOT DONE, SOUGHT IT WHERE IT WAS NOT FREELY FORTHCOMING, OR WITHHELD IT WHEN HE FANCIED IT WAS DUE; WHO THOUGHT LIGHTLY OF WHAT MOST PEOPLE VALUE, HIGHLY OF WHAT MANY ARE APT TO OVERLOOK, MADE LITTLE OF WHAT OTHERS ADMIRED IN HIM, AND MUCH OF WHAT THEY HAD NEVER BEFORE RECOGNISED IN THEMSELVES; SO FAR AS I HAVE HAD OPPORTUNITIES OF JUDGING, AND I HAVE HAD MANY, FOR HE IS

MY FATHER.



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"Suppose for a moment that our conduct at great epochs was determined entirely by reflection, without the immediate intervention of feeling which supersedes reflection, our determination as to the right would consist in an adjustment of our individual needs to the dire necessities of our lot, partly as to our natural constitutions, partly as sharers of life with our fellow-beings. Tragedy consists in the terrible difficulty of this adjustment—

'The dire strife Of poor Humanity's afflicted will, Struggling in vain with ruthless destiny.'

"Looking at individual lots, I seemed to see in each the same story, wrought out with more or less tragedy, and I determined the elements of my drama under the influence of these ideas."

GEORGE ELIOT.

JAMES VRAILLE.

CHAPTER I.

LAW AND LOVE.

The news spread like wildfire through the garrison. Some said that the colonel had been perfectly right to place him in arrest, others that Vraille was as innocent of the charge as the babe unborn. Opinions were conflicting; but all agreed that a general court-martial would be the inevitable result, and that, if guilty, it would go very hard with the culprit. The cautious presumed that Colonel Dare would never have proceeded to such extremes without good reason, while the sanguine declared that he was a pompous old idiot, and that there was not a shred of evidence against the prisoner. Only one thing was certain, and that was a court-martial.

Colonel Dare himself had no doubt at all as to the rectitude of his own conduct in the matter: he, at any rate, had made no mistake. When the responsibilities of commandant of the station had devolved upon him with all the attendant dignity of the position, he had told his wife that discipline must be maintained, and that he was determined to wheel every one into line

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VOL. I.

and show once for all that he was a man not to be trifled with. This Captain Vraille had the reputation of being a wild, dissolute young fellow, with no respect for authority; in fact, a gentleman whose conduct had more than once been the subject of the colonel's comment. He had at last committed a serious offence, and must be made an example of.

"Pour encourager les autres," put in his daughter, Edith Dare, who had been silently listening to her father's remarks. She was barely twenty years of age, so the commandant paid no heed to her flippant French, but kept his eyes fixed upon his wife's placid face as if expecting a reply. Mrs. Dare applauded his resolution in a lady-like way, and languidly agreed to all he said.

"Quite right, my love," she assented; "and, Edith," she continued, "you had better not dance with Captain Vraille again, if you meet him out anywhere. He is a dissipated young man on his own showing."

"On his own showing?" repeated her husband in a questioning tone.

"I asked him once why his hair was so white."

"Yes?" The colonel was all attention.

"And he whispered in my ear—'Vice, ma'am, vice'!"

"I'll teach him! Edith, what are you laughing at? It is no laughing matter, let me tell you."

"Has he not had long service in India?" asked the girl, "and was he not seriously ill there? Perhaps that may be the cause of his hair being white."

"He distinctly told me it was vice," persisted Mrs. Dare.

"India or no India," argued the colonel, "he was drunk when he came into my orderly-room."

"And what will be the result if it is proved he was?" asked his daughter.

"He will probably be cashiered," replied her father sternly, swelling out his chest.

"A great many people declare that he was perfectly sober, father."

"Nonsense, child. I regret to say that he was by no means sober."

"Well," replied his daughter, "all I can say is, that I am sorry you did not give him a chance, as there seems to be so much doubt. I can't help pitying him; it is a terrible punishment."

The colonel began to make some comment on his daughter's remark, but cut himself short by testily adding—"but there, you know nothing of these things."

It is at all times annoying to have one's judgment doubted. Doubt is horribly contagious, especially when impulse is beginning to cool. Not that the colonel for a moment doubted the wisdom of the step he had taken; but to hear others implying even that there was room for doubt was irritating; it made him feel uncomfortable, and he began to wish that he had kept the whole affair to himself, or, at any rate, had only confided in his wife, who always agreed with him in a sensible way instead of arguing about official matters which, of course, she could not, as a woman, be expected to understand.

"I don't believe," continued his daughter after a pause, "that he is half so dissipated as people try to

make out. Now that he is down they are finding out all sorts of things about him which they never knew before. It does not seem fair. He is engaged to a girl in London and that is why he is away so much."

"I cannot listen to tittle-tattle," returned her father, gathering up some papers off a side-table. "I go into court to give evidence on facts, not on hearsay, and my mind must not be biassed one way or the other."

"But you have been listening to a whole lot of things against him from mother."

"Edith, Edith," ejaculated that weary-eyed lady, "how can you speak so to your father on things you know nothing at all about?"

The commandant left the room, saying he wanted an hour's undisturbed quiet in his study to prepare his evidence.

The case excited a good deal of attention, and of course got into the newspapers. In this way James Vraille gained a certain notoriety which some people said he would never have acquired in any other.

In spite of the remonstrances of his friends he refused to allow any one to help him in his defence. "No," he said, when pressed to change his mind, "I will conduct my own case, and it shall be tried on its merits." He refused to make any sort of preparation for his trial, beyond naming half-a-dozen witnesses whom he intended to call; he declined even to read up the law on the subject, saying that military law was not common law, but common sense, and that he knew quite enough about procedure not to make an ass of himself. They begged him at least to protest his innocence in a memorial, which he could lay before

the court in accordance with custom; but he impatiently declared that he would do nothing of the sort.

Dissipated! It was a mild term to apply to a man who was supposed to have committed every social enormity under the sun short of a criminal offence. But no two opinions about him seemed to tally. He was reticent and rude, dogmatical and submissive, hilarious and melancholy, bright and dull; he was everything by turn and nothing long, everything a little and nothing much. Perhaps he was shy, perhaps over-sensitive; no one seemed to know exactly; and it would have taken a cleverer man than Colonel Dare to form any true conception of a character containing apparently such conflicting tendencies. Suffice it to say, that the colonel was as capable of sympathising with a man like Vraille as a salamander with a Polar bear.

Unfortunately, perhaps, for Vraille this was not the first occasion on which the colonel had formed an unfavourable impression of him. Colonel Dare, when he stood upon the hearthrug, his legs wide apart, his hands clasped behind his back, his chin on a level with his nose, and a cigar sticking up straight from his face like the funnel of a broad-beamed tug-boat, was a very formidable commandant indeed. On these occasions the amount of information he managed to impart to a knot of idlers, trying to read their newspapers when his eye was not upon them, was extraordinary. It was no use attempting to fix your attention on anything but that voice—you had to hear it—you had to be instructed, whether you liked it or not; it was part of your duty.

He had been holding forth one day with ponderous exactitude for some time when Vraille, who had been watching him with cold scrutiny and silently taking in every word that fell from his lips, suddenly interrupted him in the midst of an anecdote.

"What do you mean?" asked the irritated colonel, puffing out his cheeks like a pair of scarlet air-balloons.

"I mean that, as I happen to know the girl of whom you are speaking and was present, I thought you might not like to disparage a lady to a friend of hers unwittingly."

"Certainly," said the colonel, glowering at his junior,

and the subject dropped.

When Vraille's major came to hear of this little episode, he delivered a semi-parental lecture to his prematurely grey young captain, to the effect that no doubt Vraille was perfectly right in the ordinary sense of the word, but that to beard a commanding officer in his own mess was not right; to say the least of it, it was inexpedient, and expediency was the golden rule of the service.

"But I am engaged to marry the girl," protested Vraille. "Am I to listen——"

"My dear fellow, I congratulate you with all my heart, but it would not have hurt either you or the young lady to let old Dare ramble on—he meant nothing by what he said. It's no use kicking against the pricks, you'll only hurt yourself. Expediency, my dear chap, always bear expediency in mind whatever you do, and then it shall follow as the night, etc.—you know the rest."

This was very good advice, and Vraille learnt the

first lesson of many that made him the man he was in after-years. A chance of going on detachment with a draft occurring shortly afterwards, he again found himself listening to the advice of his mentor, and subsequently took charge of the draft.

On the morning of his return to head-quarters, after a night at sea and a long journey by rail, he found on arrival that his orders directed him to report himself to the colonel commanding the station. His baggage was lying about his room in a state approximately chaotic, and his servant was at his wits' end to find his master's things. His gloves wanted pipeclaying, his boots blacking, his sword burnishing; and Vraille started off, breakfastless, rather late, hot, flurried, and worse "turned out" than he had ever been before in his life. Having, as he thought, a minute or two to spare, he rushed into the mess on his way, and, finding the breakfast things all cleared away, drank off a glass of sherry, crammed a biscuit into his mouth, and rushed out again.

Running up the stone steps in front of the colonel's orderly-room door he had the misfortune to trip over his sword and fall. One trouser leg was cut across the knee. With a flushed face and many apologies for his appearance, he presented himself before his superior. Colonel Dare looked at his dusty figure without speaking, and coldly dismissed him. He had heard the clatter of Vraille's fall through the open window; he had noticed his dishevelled state, his halting manner, his flushed face, and had smelt the strong odour of sherry, supposing it to be whisky, which Vraille had brought with him into the room.

The conclusion was obvious, the offence heinous, the retribution swift.

If any one had suggested to the colonel that possibly a pre-existing prejudice had led him to act rather more precipitately than he would have done had Vraille been any other man, he would have indignantly repudiated the idea, and emphatically denied that any motive other than a stern sense of duty had prompted his actions—and he would only have been saying what he fully and conscientiously believed. Had he not the evidence of his senses? Was he blind or deaf? Oh, no; he had done what he had deliberately.

But no one, save his daughter Edith, had put forward any such suggestion. Vraille, meanwhile, was in arrest; his guilt or innocence remained to be proved, and until one or the other was established the stereotyped argument, that there are always two sides to a story, could be freely urged.

The prisoner remained in the same apathetic state, and refused to take any interest in the proceedings. His uncle, the lawyer, came to see him, imploring him to bestir himself and secure the assistance of counsel. As a man of the world, as a lawyer, as an uncle deeply interested in his nephew's cause and the reputation of the family name, Mr. Benjamin Vraille argued with him, and advised him strongly not to rely solely on his own unaided judgment, astutely urging that his very sense of injury might lead him unwittingly into error. But it was all of no avail; Vraille was obstinate in his determination to stand alone. The sting of the whole thing was, he said, that his character as a soldier and a gentleman was impugned. Was the pure-minded girl

he loved to marry a man with the opprobrium of "drink" attached to his name?—and should it ever be in the power of any one to say that he owed his acquittal of such a charge to the astuteness of a lawyer or to some subtle and clever method of defence? No! He had been unjustly accused; he had done nothing to deserve the disgrace of his position, and he could prove his innocence to any intelligent person in five minutes. If there was any justice at all in the system of courtsmartial, he was not afraid of the result. The employment of counsel would only lead people to believe that his case wanted careful handling. No; he would take things as they came, and wanted assistance from no one.

"It is not the court-martial itself that I care twopence about," he said bitterly; "it is the injustice that has already been done me. No court-martial can wipe that out. That will always remain the same."

The day of his trial came, and he stood before the court alone; without a note, a written declaration, or any other sign of preparation, save his witnesses. In a firm, confident voice, he pleaded "not guilty" to the charge.

Colonel Dare, the principal witness for the prosecution, stated the circumstances under which the prisoner had visited the orderly-room, swore positively and emphatically that he was then drunk, and summed up the reasons that had led him to this conclusion and to the painful necessity of placing Captain Vraille in arrest. His evidence was then subjected to cross-examination by the prisoner. His answers to the questions put were all duly written down, and, as the

catechism continued, the confidence which had marked his manner during his examination-in-chief, little by little, departed, until somehow the accuser began to look far more uncomfortable than the accused.

"Did Colonel Dare," Vraille asked at last, "send any one after me to confirm his suspicions?"

"Yes."

"What was that officer's report?"

"Sober; but I myself was so certain—" began the colonel.

"I do not wish to ask any more questions!" As Vraille said this he glanced at the witness with a look that brought the blood into the poor colonel's face, dyeing it with deeper flush than it had worn for many a long day.

Six witnesses for the defence followed, and their examination by the prisoner was marked by the extreme simplicity of the questions put, and the carelessness with which the replies were received—a course which rendered the rigidity of Colonel Dare's recent cross-examination all the more apparent. Still, although Vraille's defence was conducted in an apparently slovenly manner, the points elicited were strong and exact. The court was closed to consider its verdict, and opened again almost immediately to declare the prisoner "honourably acquitted" of the charge. Some of the members rose and shook hands with him, but he did not evince any sign of relief, and barely smiled.

Many of his brother officers came into his room to congratulate him, and a few, more observant than the rest, left it convinced that the last fortnight had made a greater impression than they would have supposed possible on a man who had taken things so philosophically; his very face and figure, to say nothing of manner, seemed to have changed.

When at last he was alone he flung himself into his chair and covered his face with his hands. For the first time in his life he was experiencing the sensation of real hatred.

Luck had never yet in Vraille's life pointed her fairy finger at him in any unmistakable way; that there was no denying. He had never experienced what is called a real good stroke of luck. Fortunate he was, without doubt; fortunate in his general surroundings and circumstances, in the possession of a sound constitution, robust health, and a not ill-favoured person; fortunate in a hundred-and-fifty ways, but no one had ever called him a lucky man. Fortune and Luck, it seemed to him, were separate and distinct if sister goddesses. It was said that Fortune favoured the brave, but that a scamp escaped detection, a man suddenly acquired wealth, a gambler made a grand coup, through Luck. Fortune was proverbially fickle, but she was consistency itself compared to Luck-and Luck chose such extraordinary favourites. Look at old Dare! he had always beeu a lucky man. Look at himself! Perhaps he had been fortunate to get into the army at all, but there had been no luck about it, only hard work; and, now that he was in, might he not have been luckier had he as a boy started in some other line of life altogether—a lawyer's, for instance, in which his uncle had more than once offered him an opening?

Vraille's reasoning, as he satthinking out these things, was slightly cynical and not exactly logical, perhaps; but then the balance of his mind had, no doubt, been thrown out of its true adjustment by recent events. But through all the gloom there smiled a lovely face whose radiance dissipated the darkness, and at the thought of it he started to his feet and commenced to pack straightway. Ah, after all, he was the luckiest man in London!

He experienced no difficulty about getting leave. His own commanding officer, the major, who had sympathised with him all through, told him to start at once, and said that he would take upon himself all the responsibility of allowing him to go pending the sanction of his application. The fact was, though every one congratulated him cordially on the result of his trial and declared that it should never have taken place, it was, nevertheless, felt that his immediate departure from the scene of action would be a relief to all concerned. That is the way of the world; the purest suffer from being pelted with mud; and Vraille drove out of the barrack-square with a feeling in his heart that he was not wanted—that, though he had proved himself blameless, still his daily presence in the eyes of his accuser was undesirable; that he had somehow lost caste, and was henceforth a marked man.

With a sense of relief, amounting even to pleasure compared to the mental strain of uncertainty under which he had been labouring for so long, he sank into the cushioned corner of a smoking compartment, lighted a cigar, and began to brood afresh over the wrong that had been done him. Dare! he would never forget that name as long as he lived. It was branded on his heart. Colonel Dare had set a mark upon him which time would probably obliterate, but the stigma of having been tried would still remain. This was bad enough; but to be labelled through the mistake of a pompous, ignorant, addle-pated old fool, for whom he had never had any other feeling than contemptuous indifference! That such men should be invested with authority and power was disgraceful and preposterous.

In this frame of mind he reached his club, and in an anxious tone inquired at the window of the hall-porter's office if there were any letters awaiting his arrival. When that sedate official had shuffled through the pile he took from a pigeon-hole marked V., and answered in the negative, a look of astonished disappointment crossed Vraille's face, and in a hesitating way, that seemed to be trying to stifle anxiety in affected unconcern, he asked—"No telegram either? I was expecting a telegram." There was none, however; and so, having ordered a room and given directions about his luggage, he sauntered into the smoking-room, and with his hands thrust into his pockets stood moodily looking out of the window, but taking no interest in any of the passers-by except the telegraph boys.

It was a gloriously bright September afternoon, but there was a dissipated look about the street, as if the sun were shining on a scene that had lately been gay and brilliant but was now dreary and desolate—like the morning rays streaming through the open windows on the remains of a night's carouse. Cabs and hansoms, guided by slackened reins, crawled slowly along the curb, their drivers every now and again lifting their whips questioningly to a likely-looking "fare"; no smart carriages with high-stepping horses rattled past, and even the doctors' broughams did not seem to be in any particular hurry; many of the foot passengers on the pavements were lounging, and others were assuming as best they could the air and demeanour of "passers through"; the roadway itself was torn up and partially barricaded with beams placed on trestles, pitch-caldrons, piles of wooden blocks covered with tarpaulins and other signs of Board of Works repair; a steam-roller rumbled in the distance, and in the windows of the houses opposite hung the spread-out sheets of daily papers. It was an excellent day for a tramp over the turnips after partridges, or for lolling on the sands at the seaside, but a bad one for the club-lounger left in London. The smoking-room was almost deserted.

After looking out of the window for some time, Vraille picked up the first edition of an evening paper, but, finding an account of the result of his trial in it, flung it on to the ground, and again sauntered into the hall. Of course no telegram had arrived in the meantime, or it would have been brought to him; still, he just made the inquiry to make quite sure, and then glanced up at the hall-clock. He would wait until four o'clock and no longer.

Four o'clock found him standing on the doorsteps, drawing on his gloves. He was faultlessly attired; the payment of a visit of some importance was evidently his intention. He gave the expected telegram five

minutes' grace, and then jumped into a hansom and drove off westward.

At the door of a neat little house in a quiet street somewhere in the neighbourhood of Cabstand Square, S.W., Vraille knocked and was admitted. He ascended the stairs two at a time, and, in a natty little drawingroom on the first floor, awaited the coming of the girl he was engaged to marry. He waited a long time; but at last the door opened, and before him in all her loveliness stood Lucy Flight—a woman whom men turned round to stare at in the street; a woman on whom nature had bestowed favours with almost too lavish a hand; a woman with the face and figure of a classic goddess, and the colouring of a Rubens' model: "A glorious woman for the stage, by all that's entrancingly histrionic," as Harold Scatter, that wellknown connoisseur of forms divine, had feelingly remarked when introduced to her one day at Sandown races. This opinion, however, for some good reason of his own, he did not at the time impart to his friend Vraille; but, carried away with poetic rapture, said airily: "A coiffure of captured sunbeams, my dear fellow; I congratulate you on your conquest." He knew nothing then of Vraille's infatuation-it was before any solemn contract had been sealed and posted for the world to read—but he hazarded his congratulations on the "off chance," he said. On that off chance, he afterwards declared, he was prepared to give long odds, for Miss Lucy had previously put sundry insinuating little questions to him with respect to Vraille, which Harold Scatter, with characteristic astuteness, had answered all together in the one comprehensive monosyllable, "Heaps"—an answer that had seemed to give his fair questioner much inward satisfaction.

She was a beautiful woman, truly; and it was a wonder that she had lived for five-and-twenty years to bear no other name at the end of them than Lucy Flight. Besieged in ball-rooms, surrounded at teatime, the recipient of bouquets and bangles by the score—the favoured idol of picnics, water-parties, regimental race meetings, and, indeed, of all the smaller social functions to which she had the entrée—she triumphed in her loveliness and outshone all her compeers.

As she smilingly advanced, Vraille sprang to meet her, and, holding her two hands in his own, looked into her face with eyes expanding as they looked, and flashing with the fire that had gained for them that epithet of wild.

"Why did you not write to my club, as I asked, Lucy?"

"My dear Jim, I've been so very busy lately, you can't think."

"Too busy to telegraph, Lucy? I expected a telegram at least; I waited for one at the club for more than an hour."

"There, there, don't begin by scolding directly you come to see me; but give me a kiss and forgive me for forgetting. You came without the telegram, so there's no harm done, after all. Come, don't bear malice, Jim; give me a kiss and make it up."

For answer he wound his arms about her, and, catching her to him, kissed her passionately again and

again, until she pleaded for mercy. Reluctantly he loosed his arms and let her go. Then hand in hand they sat upon a sofa, and began to talk, as Lucy said, sensibly.

"And what have you been doing with yourself all this time, you naughty boy, never to come and see me?"

"I have been in arrest in my quarters—I told you," he answered, dropping her hand and turning his head away.

"But you did not say what for."

He did not answer at once; he was biting his under lip and tugging at the end of his moustache.

"I was court-martialled this morning for drunkenness;" he said at last, abruptly; then, rising from his seat, he walked across the room to the window opposite, and stood looking out of it with his back to her.

"Oh," she cried, "that's very dreadful, but very interesting all the same. Come and tell me all about it. What do you walk away like that for?"

"I did not wish you to know until I could tell you myself," he said slowly. "I wrote to Mrs. Flight and asked her to keep the papers from you if she could."

All through his troubles two certainties amid a sea of doubts had sustained and buoyed him up—the certainty of his uncle's unflinching belief in his innocence, and the certainty of Lucy's sympathy, whichever way the tide would turn, when he told her all.

"I very seldom read the papers, except the Queen and the Morning Post sometimes; there was nothing about you in either of them, that I saw."

He turned sharply round and took a step towards her.

"Lucy, Lucy, do you care? Do you know what a court-martial means? Have you nothing to say?"

"Yes, Jim, of course I have—I have a great deal to say. You were always a wild, dissipated wretch—as wild as a hawk they told me—but I don't mind that. I like a man to be a little wild—it makes him interesting—I hate a milksop. That is why I always liked you, I suppose. But you can be wild and naughty without being tried by court-martial."

"I am not," he exclaimed passionately; "I am not wild! If you like to call it wild, I was wild oncethat is, I used to do what every one else did. Oh, yes, I was wild enough in that sense—I gambled, I raced, I backed bills, I hunted, I spent more money than I could afford, I drank and smoked more than I ought, I behaved like the usual idiot; but I might as well have cheated at cards, swindled book-makers, suffered from delirium tremens half my life, and been put in jail for shop-lifting-give a dog a bad name and hang him-my reputation now is much the same, and I am dissolute and wild!" In his excitement he half stretched out his hands before him, in a way that was partly indignant, partly suppliant, but wholly piteous; then changing his manner, and lowering his tone, he continued, in a different, softened strain: "Lucy," he said, seating himself beside her again and taking her hand, "you know that I have given up all that; you know that I promised you I would that day, although you did not ask me for any promise; you know, or you ought to know, that I have kept my promise from that day to this."

Her face as she listened to him flushed slightly with

the keenness of her pleasure. Jim was in one of his adorably passionate moods, when she felt most of all that she really loved him. His admiration of her always seemed to her then so far more intense and sincere than any other man's with whom she had ever flirted to pass away the time.

"My darling Jim," she said softly, "you look so handsome when you speak like that. Why did you give up all your pleasures for me, dear?"

"I knew no real pleasure till I met you, Lucy, or

pain either."

"But why did you give up your—your pursuits, then?" she persisted, insinuating the soft hand he released as he flung his arm round her waist into his other hand which rested on his knee.

"Because from the first moment I saw you I was changed. I could think of nothing day and night but your sweet face; it haunted me awake and asleep—your eyes were always looking at me. After I had seen you once, I went everywhere to meet you—oh, you know, you know it all," he broke off; "I have told it you a hundred times before."

"Tell me again, Jim; I love to listen."

"Yes, but does telling make you understand?"

"Of course I understand."

"I think you will in time," he said softly, half to himself. "My ambition is attained, the only one I ever really had."

"Yes, dear, you have won."

Vraille wondered in his heart if he had in very truth conquered, and at first felt tempted to inquire: "What if I had been found guilty to-day, and were soon to be

turned out of the army in disgrace?" but put that thought away as an unworthy thing.

"I am honourably acquitted," he said.

"Ah! I am so glad." She looked what she said, and sighed.

He turned to her, and, taking her face between his hands, gazed silently into her eyes as if to read in their blue depths the verdict that he had been too great a coward to listen to in words. Reassured apparently by what he saw, he bent his head and kissed her.

"It has often crossed my mind to ask you something, Lucy," he said in a deep thick voice, "but I have never had the courage. Do you ever repent your promise to me? If there is a shade of doubt in your mind about the step you are about to take, tell me, and I will leave you. I will never trouble you again. I will not promise a whole lot of things about everlasting constancy and such nonsense, but you shall hear of me no more. I have a chance—a desire, I mean—of going to India, right away from you. I can take it now better than at another time. Shall I?"

"No," she said, without a moment's hesitation, unless you take me with you. But I have a horror of India; neither of us need go, surely."

CHAPTER II.

ENGAGEMENTS.

The whole duty of man is complex and manifold; the whole duty of Mrs. Flight was simple and twofold. The main objects of her existence were to chaperon her daughter and to study contemporary history and politics. Between these two occupations she divided her time, regarding the one as a duty tinged with pleasure, the other as a pleasure tinged with duty: she hated balls and parties, but liked to know what was going on in Lucy's immediate vicinity; she hated Mr. Gladstone, but took the keenest interest in all he said and did.

She was a quaint little old lady to be the mother of such a splendid creature as Lucy Flight; but society did not trouble itself much about the chaperon in its devotion to her beautiful charge, and only imagined, if it gave the subject a thought at all, that the beauty's father must have been a singularly handsome man. During the lifetime of that legal luminary (then second partner of the eminent firm, Bite, Flight & Co., of which Mr. Bite junior was the Co. in waiting), his wife had enjoyed the luxuries of a very comfortable income, but at his death little but the mantle of his astuteness had fallen on his widow.

Mrs. Flight was a shrewd woman, and, by keeping

the accounts of her little house near Cabstand-Square always slightly in debt, she was enabled to provide herself with all the political literature of the day and her daughter with fashionable amusement and wellexecuted ball-dresses. But as time went on and the tide of political print seemed to be always on the flood, while the receding focus of the old lady's vision set in steadily on the ebb, Mrs. Flight found it more and more difficult to keep abreast of the times, and began to wish with all her heart that Miss Lucy would secure the services of a permanent chaperon for life and buy her own ball-dresses; she wanted to tuck her toes up on the fender, eschew frivolity, curtail expense, and read in peace for the remainder of her days. Lucy's engagement to Vraille, was, therefore, a subject of calm gratification to Mrs. Flight, and she was on all occasions that gentleman's strong ally.

"My dear Lucy," she said on the day succeeding Vraille's visit, "it is positively irritating to hear you talk in the way you have been doing about the colour of a man's hair, when everything else about him is all that a girl could want,—and, if you don't like his hair, you can dye it easily enough after you are married. But I should leave it alone if I were you. Look at his beautiful brown eyes and moustache,—the very contrast makes him handsome to my mind. Besides, beggars can't be choosers, Lucy, and we are practically beggars."

"That's not my fault," put in Lucy.

"Yes, it is; this last season of yours has nearly finished us, and here we are, obliged to stay in London when the very tradespeople are all at the seaside. Not that I mind much, for, when you're married, I shall live on here in peace, except for a trip now and again during the recess to the Buxton Wells."

"It's this idea of India I don't like," said Lucy, pouting her pretty lips and contracting her fair brow. "He is bent on going back to India."

"He was very ill there before," said Mrs. Flight grimly. "Take comfort from that fact, if you won't from any other."

Nothing in her daughter's face showed that she resented or even appreciated the significance of her mother's retort as she placidly continued: "The prospect of being exiled in a wild country, with a sick husband, is not particularly pleasant, you must allow."

"Exiled? wild?—nonsense, child! You are fiveand-twenty; you have had your chances and missed
them. I don't wish to say anything harsh, but to put
it mildly, my dear, you are not clever; and though,
perhaps, you might have managed matters better once,
you certainly won't now. And you have nothing
whatever to grumble about; you ought to consider
yourself an exceedingly lucky girl. You like society,
you'll have plenty; you love admiration, you need not
be afraid of that falling off for another dozen years, at
least; you hate thought, and books, and politics, you're
going to leave them behind you. What more do you
want?"

Lucy never quite understood her mother, and had learnt from experience that little was to be gained by argument or contradiction. She contented herself by changing the subject and taking no notice of these equivocal compliments.

"He wants me to go and see his uncles and aunts and things," she said.

"Of course he does; he would not be the man he is if he didn't. Go and see them, and don't make a fool of yourself. Your best chance of not doing so is to say as little as possible; rely on your looks, my dear—rely on your looks, and you won't go far wrong. Any good-looking woman can win a man, but it takes a clever one to keep him, so mind what you are about;" and the little lady chuckled to herself as if pleased at her own remarks. After a pause she continued:—

"Ah, your father was a clever man, and I'm no fool; your sisters took all the brains and left you all the looks, and yet they married first; and, now that I think of it, let me give you a little piece of gratuitous advice. If you want to win a man's heart, let him talk as much as ever he likes about himself and listen, especially when his heart is sore; don't drag him off to a theatre instead, as you did Jim last night."

"He wanted to go."

"Did he?" asked Mrs. Flight, in a tone that implied "he did nothing of the sort."

"Certainly he did."

"Did he suggest it?"

"No, not exactly."

"I thought not; let all suggestions come from him for a time."

"Oh, I shall be all right, mother, never fear," said Lucy languidly, stretching her beautiful figure at full length on the sofa and stifling a yawn. "He is very much in love with me—very much indeed, I think—and talks about our being married at once."

"Agree to that," said Mrs. Flight tartly.

"He's coming to lunch, you know—I asked him—and he's going to take me out afterwards."

"Go about with him as much as ever you like, my dear, only remember what I have told you. Be careful—there's many a slip, etc., even when the lip is as pretty as yours."

Lucy promised to be careful with an air of assurance, as if confident in the power of her charms unaided by any care; and then they discussed Vraille's recent court-martial in all its bearings. Mrs. Flight said that it was a trump card in her daughter's hand, properly held and properly played. Lucy said she fancied it was a disgrace any way, but that she supposed Jim did not drink; she hoped not, for her own sake. They then chatted about the position of affairs generally until Vraille came in to lunch.

He was as radiant as a sallow-complexioned, grey-haired young man could be, with a flower in his button-hole, brightly shining boots, and a brand-new silk hat. He brought a present for Lucy with him, a spray of gardenias and maiden-hair, which he presented with shy gallantry. She held the flowers to her delicate nostrils, looking up at him with her grand eyes as she did so, and smiled her gratitude.

Luncheon was devoted to an animated discussion on the Irish question, in which Lucy did not join. Mrs. Flight argued, declaimed, and apostrophised to her heart's content. Vraille rather enjoyed hearing her talk, for her remarks were much to the point and she knew her subject; but Lucy made an early pretext for escape, and her face wore a weary expression until Vraille brought to the door the patentest of patent hansoms he could find in Cabstand Square.

They drove to Bond Street, where he bought his fiancée an emerald and ruby ring, just to see, as he explained, the size of her finger, so that the awkward necessity of having it measured for a plainer ornament later on might be avoided. Then they walked to the National Gallery, the only exhibition of pictures in London which Lucy had never seen. Here Vraille told her stories of the scenes and incidents represented in the pictures, while she held the catalogue and listened. He was a mine of information, and told her a hundred things of which the catalogue contained not a single word. He had spent hours in the gallery as a boy, he said, and his childish fancy had attached stories to some of the men and women in the pictures, especially to the less important figures of the larger canvases, which he had never afterwards been wholly able to forget; some particular faces—and he pointed out one or two to her-always seemed to look at him with kindly recognition when he entered the room in which they hung, as if they were old friends welcoming him back to their society. And in a sense they were old friends; he knew them so well that his interest in them always drew his attention away from the other faces surrounding them, and, in some cases, their stories the stories, that is, that he himself had made up about them—were more familiar to him than even the central idea of the picture itself. Half laughingly he outlined the past histories of a man here and a woman there, or connected the lives of a boy in one picture and a girl in another, and sketched their futures until he brought

them together living happily in a third. He traced the sequence of events that changed the child sitting on its mother's knee in one room into the boy riding on a pony in the next, and so on, from room to room, from boyhood to manhood, from manhood to old age.

"That is the last time we see him," he said, pointing to a figure in the background of a group. "There he is, standing on one side, frowning slightly and taking no part in the action of the scene. All through his life it has always been the same," Vraille continued, speaking as earnestly as if the story he was telling were the actual history of the man; "we have always seen him standing on one side, taking, apparently, but little interest in what is going on, neither helping nor hindering those about him, but just standing aloof, thinking. Though every one knows him, he is not a person of any particular importance, and if he does or says anything it is just what any one of those about him might do or say; and of course he is judged by his actions and speech. To the outer world he is just as we see him there—unimportant without being insignificant; interesting, perhaps, but in no way remarkable. He knows all this; he knows his character in the eyes of the world well enough; he can judge himself as easily as others can. But that man is not he; he is always living two lives—one in the world, one in himself. He, in some strange sense which he cannot understand, stands by seeing and hearing that man say and do things, and judging him like any one else. He himself—the himself that no one knows or ever will know-without necessarily condemning that man's actions, is powerless to control them, and without the

desire to alter the words in his mouth listens to him as he might to any other fellow being. I suppose we are all more or less like that man. Oh, often and often "— he exclaimed, taking his eyes off the picture and looking at the beautiful face beside him—"often and often have I felt that I am some other person than myself, looking out on myself, judging myself, and yet helpless to alter myself. Often in speaking to any one I feel I am standing by listening to that creature whom the world identifies with me, but who is no more me than the person he is talking to. I can't explain myself better, and, of course, you cannot understand?"

There was a question in his tone though none in his remark, and he looked at his companion as if hoping for, rather than expecting, an answer; but none came.

"Of course not—not yet," he said. "But sometimes I have thought, Lucy, that two people might learn to know each other, in course of time, so intimately that even that secret self—which is not conscience, for conscience need not be secret—might be mutually revealed and blended in the spirit."

Lucy thought that perhaps what he said was possible, but was absolutely certain that it was high time for them to be going, for "the days were shortening wonderfully," and "winter would be upon them before they knew where they were;" the evening was fast drawing in, and he had promised to take her to Charbonnel and Walker's for a cup of chocolate before going home. Vague ideas of delirium tremens were possibly flying through fair Lucy's mind when she asked Vraille thoughtfully the nature of his illness

in India: had he had a sunstroke ever, she wanted to know?

"A sunstroke! no; whatever made you think of India and sunstrokes just now?"

"Oh, nothing particular; they came into my head, that's all."

She told her mother afterwards of the strange way in which Vraille had talked in the gallery, and wondered whether he had a tile loose, or a B in his bonnet, or some such unpleasantness; she hoped not, for her own sake. Her mother only laughed and said that, if Lucy were going to suspect every one who said things she could not understand of madness, she might as well take it for granted at once that the world was a large lunatic asylum.

As a memento of their conversation Vraille bought her one or two engravings which only cost him four or five guineas, and then they drove back to Bond Street for the chocolate, stopping at his club on the way that he might cash a cheque.

"You seem very fond of pictures, Jim," she said, as she sat alternately sipping and stirring her chocolate; "do you paint yourself?"

He laughed. "A little," he said; "like everything else I do—a little. I amuse myself by drawing sometimes; I always had a taste that way."

"You don't caricature, I hope."

"No; I can't, or else perhaps I might."

Lucy was glad. She hated caricaturists, she said, and those kind of people who made fun of one; but she would like him to draw a picture of herself, or paint one, which would be better still: "a nice one," she

pleaded; "do paint my picture, Jim, do. I'll sit as still as still."

"I could not, Lucy; I would not try, for anything. But I'll have your picture done for you by some one who can do you justice, if you like. Come with me to-morrow morning and we'll make an appointment."

Lucy was delighted. "You dear old Jim," she exclaimed; "yes, I'll come with you to-morrow, certainly. Oh, that's better than all the pictures in the National Gallery, isn't it?"

And so it was arranged, and they drove home together in high spirits, Lucy with the "lovely box of bonbons" which Jim had given her on her lap and one hand clasped in his.

It was a long way to Cabstand Square, and by the time Vraille had seen Lucy home, driven back to his club, changed into evening clothes and returned, it was past the usual Flight dinner hour and his hostess was rather cross. But, as the little lady in the course of the afternoon had remembered a serious complication which she had quite overlooked at lunch, she speedily regained her good humour in discussing it with Vraille. She talked well, and, thoroughly enjoyed hearing herself talk; and a man who listened attentively, as if he understood and appreciated what she said, and who, moreover, every now and again put in intelligent remarks of his own, was a godsend to her; she delighted in a sensible discussion, as she called it, with her future son-in-law.

But she was not the woman to overlook her daughter's interests; she was a thoughtful mother and a discreet chaperon, and, once back in the drawing-room, she

settled herself in her easy-chair with a 'Blackwood' on one knee and a 'Nineteenth Century' on the other, and silently compared their opposing views. Lucy, who was famed for her sweet contralto, sang song after song to her lover as he selected them, was languishing and lovable, and seen at her very best, Vraille thought, as he turned over the leaves of her music and drank in every note. Mrs. Flight, meanwhile, turned over the leaves of her magazines, and, lulled by the soft music, gradually lost sense of her surroundings and fell asleep.

Then the pair behaved themselves as young people in such circumstances usually do behave, and presently, after sundry love passages of a very tender and strictly confidential nature, began by slow and sweet degrees to descend from heaven to earth, and in murmuring voices to discuss their future prospects. They needed discussing, for Vraille said that his recent courtmartial had upset all his plans.

"I hate the idea of serving under that man again," he whispered, a thrill in his tone giving the whisper a harsh quivering sound; "it will be impossible to get on with him. I despise him, and he knows it."

"But surely, Jim," she murmured back, "there are other places to serve in beside India? Is it necessary to go to India? I do so dread the idea," and she shuddered.

He comforted her, and then answered: "It all depends upon what exchanges may be open. I am going to see a man called Skrim, an agent, about an exchange to-morrow morning."

"You won't forget about taking me to the photographer's about my picture?"

- "No, no, I'll not, forget. I shall have lots of time to see Skrim first."
 - "I'll meet you at the shop door."
 - "Yes; and then I can tell you what I've done."
- "And be sure, Jim, you get a nice little English station."
- "I'll do the very best I can for your sweet sake; and I'll promise to decide nothing without first telling you."
- "It seems a dreadful pity that you should have to move at all, when you were so comfortable where you are," said Lucy despondently; she had found Vraille's present station a very attractive place on more than one occasion, and had quite looked forward to settling down in it altogether.

Her words opened the old sore and it bled afresh. "Oh, the infinity of mischief done by folly!" he exclaimed in a gust of passion, throwing himself back in his seat. "Fools do more harm in the world than knaves, Lucy, I verily believe. But for the work of a fool we might have married and settled down where I am without a thought of India. I do not like taking you to the scene of my arrest and trial. Let us start afresh—altogether afresh; and let me wipe out the disgrace of it all by my own action, my endeavour, by hard work, and so make for myself a future that will do me credit. I will—I will some day; and you shall help me."

He explained to her how ambition had sprung out of his sense of injury; how a new purpose had been grafted into his life; how henceforth he intended to live with the one great object in view of raising him-

self high above the heads of such men as Colonel Dare, and refuting in a practical way the charges that had been falsely brought against him. But with all his fire and enthusiasm he failed to kindle in Lucy's eyes the same glow of animation that had shone there the day before, when he told her that she, Lucy Flight, had been the unconscious instrument that had wrought such changes in his mode of life. This other incitement to reform was not half so interesting as the first; in it she took no part; it reflected no credit upon herself, and that was what she liked to hear about.

"I have told no one but you of my determination," he concluded; "no one but you would take the trouble to try and understand it. From you I have no secrets; and you—you will understand, I know."

Yes, Lucy understood, of course, but at the same time she could not see why all these things could not be effected without going to India. Why not stay comfortably at home and do them? That was what she cou'd not understand.

This was natural, and Vraille, only too happy to enlarge upon the subject, explained: India was the country for a soldier who wished to get on; he had done a good deal of service in India, and he was known there; he would pass an examination in Hindustani and qualify for an interpretership; chances and opportunities were occurring every day in India; it was the land of enterprise. But, since she wished it, he would willingly stay at home—it did not matter much.

Mrs. Flight here suddenly woke up and declared she had heard every word he had been saying. "India! enterprise!" she exclaimed, sitting bolt upright in her VOL. I.

D

chair; "it means war; I feel certain of it. It is the land of wars—the land of swords and soldiers. It always must be so: '42 and Brydon are coming all over again, as sure as Gladstone—but that is not exactly what we were talking about, is it?" she broke off rather feebly.

Vraille had not told Lucy half of what he wished to say—much was on his mind to pour forth to her, and he looked upon Mrs. Flight's awakening as unfortunately premature. Her remarks, too, were inopportune; he had carefully avoided mentioning the possibilities of war to Lucy for fear of frightening her needlessly. However, it was past eleven, and there was no help for it but to go.

He walked in the direction of his Club with the depressing feeling that his heart was overloaded; that in the act of disburdening it he had been interrupted, so that it was still full to overflowing. It was not the first time he had experienced the feeling after a day spent in the society of his inamorata; but in this instance, he told himself, the fault lay solely with her mother.

At the club he met Scatter, young Careless, and one or two others, who asked him to join them in a midnight grill, Harold Scatter adding the suggestion that they should all drink health to Benedicts and confusion to old Dare.

Readily enough Vraille accepted the invitation, and in a few minutes was transformed from the moody sentimental lover into the gay and careless knockabout whom people were so ready to call dissipated. He could not help it; it was his nature to be happy;

society and genial companionship were meat and drink to him; he was the jolliest of the party, and all his troubles and anxieties were drowned and smothered in stout and devilled kidneys. About 2 A.M. he sauntered home to his lodging. The empty streets, the cold night air, and finally his dreary bedroom, struck his hilarity with a succession of chills, and down, down, down sank his spirits, until, by the time he was between the sheets, doubts and fears, misgivings and self-accusations, helped him to hear the clocks strike three and four before he feel asleep.

Mr. Skrim was a round little shiny-faced old gentleman, whose figure and general appearance suggested the idea of a rosy-cheeked apple; and yet he was the means of shaping the ends of many a rough-hewn destiny, and a fairly sharp instrument for the purpose. A genial, smiling factor in the futures of many of his fellow men—a bland and unctuous personification of fate, was Mr. Skrim. He offered Vraille a seat in a low confidential voice.

At first it seemed that there would be no difficulty in arranging matters to the applicant's entire satisfaction; numbers of gentlemen would give anything to step into Captain Vraille's shoes, and were only waiting for such a chance to snap it up at once. But some of them, it turned out on inquiry, were stationed in the Bermudas or the Mauritius, others were expecting to sail to Hong-Kong or Singapore at a moment's notice, while others again were uncertain whether their next move would be to Aden or Ceylon. No officers were desirous of leaving the United Kingdom, except one,

who had intimated a willingness to go anywhere so long

as he got two thousand pounds for going there.

"Now, if you would take a nice Indian station," said Mr. Skrim, in his soft, purring voice, "we could fit you out at once; give you your choice, in fact, of three or four charming places."

"I don't want India," said Vraille, hoarsely, trying

to look as if he meant what he said.

"There's Ghoojeram, Ransidnugger, Jujabpoor," said Mr. Skrim, running his finger down a list before him and paying no heed to Vraille's objections. "You see," he continued persuasively, leaning back in his chair and tossing his spectacles up on to his forehead, "exchanges are so easily arranged for you artillery officers; you have only to say the word and you can go to any part of the world you like."

"It doesn't seem so," said Vraille, ruefully.

"And I should think," continued Mr. Skrim, hitching his thumbs into the armholes of his waistcoat, "that an officer would go almost anywhere sooner than serve under Colonel Dare."

"Come, that's no business of yours," said Vraille, hotly.

"No, no," returned Mr. Skrim in, no way put out; "no business of mine, of course; but I know, I know Captain Vraille, and I must say I pity your successor. By the way, have you ever met Major Bunce? Charming man! you would like him immensely—immensely; his captain is at home on sick leave, looking out for an exchange. That's the Ghoojeram battery—the pleasantest station in India."

"I tell you I don't want to go to India. I want to stay at home."

"Then," said Mr. Skrim, changing his tactics, "you must come to me again in three months' time. There will be any amount of opportunities then."

"You think there will be war?"

"In three months," Mr. Skrim replied, careful as usual not to commit himself, "men will be flocking to India and paying through the nose to get there; as it is, no money is passing for exchanges between India and good home stations."

"Ah!" sighed Vraille; Mr. Skrim's insinuations were having their effect.

"Don't decide immediately, Captain Vraille, leave the matter in my hands. I will make every inquiry and let you know the result. Kindly leave me your address. Doubtless I shall be able to get you exactly what you want. Should you change your mind about India, of course you will let me know—by telegram would be best. Good morning;" and Mr. Skrim bowed his client out of one door, tinging his bell to let his clerk know that the other was at the next applicant's disposal.

Vraille's first feeling as he stepped into the street was one of keen and bitter disappointment; he would have jumped at Mr. Skrim's offer, and then and there accepted the exchange to Ghoojeram, had there been no one's wishes but his own to consult in the matter; but Lucy's abhorrence of India deterred him. Sooner than thwart the first wish of any importance she had expressed since he had become engaged to her, he would go back to Colonel Dare.

Thus thinking, he hurried along to keep his appointment with her at the photographer's. He was five or

six minutes late, but he was before her, and glad to find he had not kept her waiting. He paced the pavement up and down, thinking, and struggling to put Ghoojeram out of his thoughts.

At last Lucy came, radiant and smiling as the morning. In a moment his sombre thoughts were dissipated. The sight of her bewitching loveliness sent a glow of gladness through his heart, and illumined his face as he hurried to meet her with pride and pleasure.

She was sorry to have kept him waiting, but the morning had slipped away without her noticing the time. She was full of enthusiasm about the proposed photograph, and without more ado hurried into the shop. Should it be a panel or a cabinet? Which would look best painted on china? Was there a larger size? Should she be taken in walking or evening costume? She favoured evening. She did not inquire so particularly as to Vraille's wishes as his opinions. An appointment for the following day was at last finally arranged, and all minor details settled, when Vraille took her to the Grand Hotel for lunch, Miss Lucy was hungry, and enjoyed the good things set before her like a healthy, sensible woman; but Vraille talked so eagerly that he ate but little. He recapitulated all the minutiæ of his morning's interview, and again and again expressed his regrets for having been unable to settle matters, as he had hoped to do, to her satisfaction.

"I am so sorry, Lucy," he said, before bidding her good-bye, "I had nothing definite to tell you, that your anxiety might be at an end. It is not fair to you, I know; but indeed I cannot help myself."

She was not down-hearted, however, and encouraged him with assurances that something would be sure to turn up.

"We shan't go to India, I feel certain," she said, giving him her hand out of the cab window; "and you won't forget the photographer to-morrow. You will come for me in plenty of time, won't you?"

CHAPTER III.

UNCLE BEN.

THE younger Pitt took after his father; but, for the most part, talent, character, propensities and suchlike things skip a generation, like the gout. Parsons' sons often turn out wicked, and a pedagogue's children generally hate books. James Vraille's father was, or rather had been when he was alive, a doctor of divinity and a head schoolmaster, so that by the law of averages James Vraille was heavily and doubly handicapped from the day that he first started on the race of life. He made a bad start. At school he was always in trouble, and did very little work-no more than he could possibly help, in fact. He brought home plenty of silver challenge-cups, presentation cricket bats, and "first fifteen" football jerseys, but his prizes were conspicuous for their absence, and his reports for them "very indifferents."

He did not always enjoy his holidays, and never unless his Uncle Ben was staying at Orleigh with his brother the Doctor, which, luckily for Master Jim, very often happened to be the case; for Uncle Ben naturally chose holiday-time for his visits, and was pretty regular at midsummer,—at Christmas a certainty. Between uncle and nephew existed an undefined affinity. They were the best of friends, and many a time had Uncle Ben acted as peacemaker between the boy and

his father. While it remained an understood thing in the family that Jim would some day be taken into partnership by the old lawyer, the boy continued to be as idle as ever; but when the subject of the army as a profession had been broached by the young scamp himself, indignantly discussed, and finally settled, he suddenly began to work. The Doctor was disgusted at his son's decision, but Uncle Ben quoted the family motto, Nosce teipsum, and declared that the lad should be allowed to follow his own inclinations.

Children remember little things, and hide them in their hearts. Sometimes the impression made by some trivial occurrence in childhood is retained through life. James Vraille never forgot the first (and only) prize he gained at school. With the prospect of a commission as an incentive, he began to read, mark, learn, and pay attention. It was uphill work; he had a lot of lost ground to cover before he could start fair. But he got on and got up. For three terms in succession he was beaten by the same boy. At last he won the class prize over that boy's head, and carried it wrapped in tissue paper all the way from the school-house door to his own home under his arm rather than trust it to the vicissitudes of his portmanteau in the luggage-van. He took it into his father's study and gave it into his father's hand. The Doctor, himself a schoolmaster with a high reputation as a classic, praised him and patted him on the shoulder, and, after turning over the leaves of the volume carelessly, placed it on a side table, remarking in a ruminating tone that after much experience he had come to the conclusion that prizes were, after all, a poor test of a boy's ability, and that

competition was not a sound thing in principle. He was glad, however, to see that his son was doing well in mathematics; it was not a study he knew much about; but of course he was glad.

Every detail of that interview stood out clear in Vraille's memory whenever he thought of his school days. He could see the pained expression of the boy's face as he left the room. He could see him pitch the book into a drawer in his little bedroom, where it lay, wrapped in its tissue paper, untouched from that day forward until it was sold in a job lot at the auction that had succeeded his father's death.

He failed to get into the army at his first attempt; he was not a clever man like his father, who wrote treatises on Juvenal and Thucydides, and books of all sorts about ancient old gentlemen for the edification of modern young ones. Perhaps he would have done better had he not tried again, but then and there accepted his uncle's renewed offer and become a lawyer. His father took no interest in a career of which he knew nothing; the little ambitions, difficulties, and annoyances of a soldier's life were paltry things to him compared to the importance of a Greek root or the significance of a Latin derivation. He cared for no soldiers but Cæsar and Hannibal and Xenophon; he did not understand the matter of allowances, and kept his son short of money and well in hand. But de mortuis-

He died; his wife soon followed him; his second son had died in childhood, and his daughters were all married. Jim came into his money, and, like a duckling taking to water in spite of the precepts and example of its foster-mother, rushed headlong into pleasures; and he thoroughly enjoyed himself. He enjoyed himself for a good long time longer than most men, for he had arrears to make up. However, he had at last found some one beside Uncle Ben to take an interest in what he did; and after ascending the well-known stairs two at a time, he knocked at that lawyer's office door with a knock a great deal heavier than his heart.

"Come in!" roared a lusty voice from the inside; and Vraille obeyed.

"Hallo, Jim, my boy! I might have guessed it was you by the infernal row you made," said Uncle Ben; "you cost me a new panel every time you come here—you and your beastly artillery. But come in now you are here, and shut what's left of the door; I'm not so fond of draughts as I was. Sit down over there out of the way, and I'll attend to you in one minute. Here, here's a cigar; it'll keep you quiet."

Vraille did as he was told, and sat tapping the toe of his patent leather boot with his stick and puffing his cigar, which was a good one, while Uncle Ben went on with his writing.

Seated at his desk, he looked like a man whose words and ways and thoughts were all perfectly legal and nothing else—an unbending, uncompromising, matter-of-fact, six-and-eightpenny parchment sort of man. But Jim knew better. He remembered him in the old days at Orleigh Grammar-school, looking on at football or cricket, and taking much interest in boys and boys' ways. "The false quantity," the Orleigh boys called him, because of his little person and large voice, and he enjoyed the joke as much as they did. But wher-

ever he was, or whatever he did, he was healthy and happy, brisk and business-like, sonorous and shrewd—wonderfully shrewd, "the family" thought—difficult to defeat in argument, difficult to gainsay, easy to get on with, but not always easy to understand. He had no breadth to make up for want of height, except from ear to ear. His bald head seemed to be all forehead; but his little legal whiskers, deep-set twinkling eyes and beetling eye-brows made ample amends for the dignity that another cubit of stature might have added to his appearance. The family, his clients, and his nephew respected him.

"Well, Jim," he said presently, swinging himself round in his swivel chair, and facing his nephew with a face changed as much as an actor's after the falling of the curtain, "you were right not to employ counsel in your case, after all. Nosce teipsum, nosce teipsum; you are a real Vraille."

As eldest surviving member of the family, Mr. Benjamin Vraille of Bedford Row was rather proud of the distinction of representing it in his person. The Vrailles, he said, had "come over at the Conquest," and their motto had been conferred by the great William himself upon a hitherto unknown Norman who had saved the Conqueror's life at Hastings. The words bore a double significance. The Vrailles had "known themselves" from that time forth. "Know thyself," Uncle Ben construed as meaning "know thy own mind." He always knew his own mind, and expected other people to know theirs.

Jim said that it did not take counsel to see through wanton injustice, and pulled hard at his cigar.

"Aye, but it isn't every man would have the pluck to stand up alone against the quibbles of the law; and that same piece of injustice, by the looks of you, seems to have pulled you down a bit, eh?"

"Yes," said Jim, shortly.

"But don't you go taking things more seriously than they're worth. It's a way you have, I'm afraid. Meet 'em; and, if you can, defeat 'em; but don't worry about 'em afterwards. It's all over now, and well over. You showed the stuff you were made of for about the first time since I've known you, though I always knew you had it in you. You knew your own mind, my boy, and I was proud of you."

Vraille said something about common sense and uncommon nonsense, and explained at some length the freedom of military law from quibbles; and then they began talking about prospects and futures, and altered states and circumstances, and family affairs, until they got at last to Mr. Skrim.

"Hang me," said Uncle Ben, emphatically, "if I can see the sense of exchanging. It looks like pique—as if you were ashamed to go back."

"My coming away was a relief to everybody," Jim replied.

That was just it; he knew that every one had felt relieved when his cab had fairly passed the sentry at the gate, and he felt that, consequently, every one would be sorry to see his cab return. It did not follow; but he had only his own feelings to judge other people's by.

"No reason why you should stay away altogether run away like a whipped cur." It was a bard expression, and Vraille's face flushed.

"I'm not afraid of Dare," he said angrily, "however much I may hate him."

"Don't hate, my boy; it's never worth while."

"Well, despise him then."

"That'll do you no good, either. I don't like Colonel Dare any better than you do; but in your place I should go back and meet him as if nothing had happened. That strikes me as the manly thing for you to do."

It struck Jim—struck him as a "facer," he said; he had never looked at the matter in that light before; he had only thought that his position under Dare would be intolerable both for himself and Lucy.

"Oh, sentiment be—— laid aside for a moment," said the old gentleman. "If I thought an exchange was the right thing, I'd give you a couple of thousand for one to-morrow; but I don't. You've been bucketing about all over the place for Lord knows how long—not that I ever thought the worse of you for your pranks—and, now that you're upset all of a sudden, your judgment is unsettled. You'll think as I do in a week's time, if you don't let your affections get the upper hand of you."

"I never knew I had any—until lately."

"I did; and I knew they'd find you out some day. Your father used to tell me sometimes about tender-heeled Achilles; I used to tell him about a tender-hearted boy. But we could not always understand one another, your father and I. Our educations were different; only I knew a bit more of the world than he did, for all his Latin primers."

And then Uncle Ben went on to say other things about a boat being all the better for ballast, and running as much as possible on an even keel, for she answered her helm truer so in rough weather; and about family mottoes, and knowing one's own mind, until Jim stopped him with—

"Uncle Ben, I believe you are the best fellow in this world—too good to make promises to——"

"Don't want 'em," was interpolated.

"But it's easy enough for me to keep straight now; and, if you're better pleased with me in future, remember it's not my fault, but Lucy's."

"She isn't sharp, is she, Jim? I hate sharp women," said the little lawyer, screwing up his eyes.

His nephew explained. He explained with that deliberate earnestness which comes of conviction.

James Vraille was no fool, whatever he was; but there comes a time to every man, sooner or later—better for him if it comes sooner—and, generally speaking, only once in his whole lifetime, when a little naked deity with a pair of little wings and a quiver slung over his shoulder flutters down upon him and puts a pair of chubby hands over his eyes, so that he sees crooked—if he sees at all—for a period of time that is regulated by no known laws. Second-lieutenants and secretaries of state, ploughboys and plenipotentiaries, paupers and princes, are all subject to the affliction—affection, perhaps, is a better word—and, like the measles, the sooner they get over it the better for them, for it is apt to be more fatal in after-life.

"Well, well," he said, when his nephew had quite finished, "I was never married—married myself, you

see, and I know very little about women except litigious ones. My opinions about matrimony are not worth much, but my opinion is that it will do you good. A good woman is the making of a man—a bad 'un his ruin. Flight was a bit of a scamp, I'm afraid; but that's no reason why his daughter should not be everything that's honest and straightforward. Pity she hasn't a little money; but, luckily, that won't matter much to you, my boy, so long as she knows her own mind."

Any one standing outside the door, and listening to these two talking without being able to see them, would have supposed that the "Jim" being spoken to was a little fellow in knickerbockers, and would have wondered how it could possibly be that the "boy" and matrimony had anything in common. But Jim, though h's five-and-thirtieth birthday was an event of the past, and no one could tell what had been the original colour of his hair, was still a boy to Uncle Ben, and always would be, if he lived to be a hundred and his uncle a hundred and twenty-four. But they understood one another, and chatted on and on, until the old gentleman supposed that they had better get to business. At the sound of the word he underwent a sort of Jekyll-Hyde transformation—was no longer Uncle Ben but Lawyer Vraille. In ten minutes Jim knew more about his own affairs than he had known before in all his life—perhaps because, for the first time, he gave them his whole attention. Then they came to the settlements. Here they disagreed. Uncle Ben said his ideas were founded on common sense and fairness; Vraille said the terms were scurvy; Uncle Ben

that he would draw up no other. Vraille supposed that he could will his money—the rest of it—as he liked afterwards; Uncle Ben suggested that that was quite an after-consideration. The matter was settled at last—as Uncle Ben wished.

As Vraille was marrying Lucy for love—pure, honest, downright love—he wanted to show her the extent of his love by settling on her the one-half of his worldly possessions; but, as his uncle had not been able to see more than about an eighth of his argument, Jim walked to an office in the City and insured his life. That, and the absolute settlement of a small but sufficient annuity as pin-money, he thought would do; yes, that would do—with a will in case of accidents. It was late when he got back to his Club.

Now, there are some men whose affairs seem to be arranged for them in the proper order; others who are obliged to spend a great deal of unnecessary time in putting together the pieces of the puzzle of life, because they are handed to them out of turn. Vraille was one of these. No sooner had he settled on one course of action than some unlooked-for circumstance would often arise to upset his plans and unsettle his mind, when, if it had only happened at the right time, there would have been no difficulty.

He had pretty well decided that he would act on his uncle's advice and go back to Colonel Dare, should Lucy see no objection, when the telegraphic apparatus in the hall of his Club began to click out tape and intelligence. He arrived to find it in full click, but too late to get anywhere near it. A knot of men were

standing round it, hemming it in on every side. But presently a servant tore the tape into lengths and pinned them up on a notice-board; and then, over the heads and shoulders of those in front of him, he read with difficulty: "Complications... frontier... possibility... reinforcements... England... ordered out..." and whistled. Phew! this made all the difference. What would his uncle say now? Should he wire to Skrim? No; Ghoojeram might go to the devil, or the devil to Ghoojeram, at any rate until he had consulted with Lucy.

It was a warlike little tape, but, after the manner of tapes, was cautious; it was only a preparatory tape and did not commit itself. But it had its effect upon the Stock Exchange and the Skrim Agency and other large offices, and Jim received a telegram next day which (punctuated) read: "Ransidnugger, Jujabpore, both gone. Will you take Ghoojeram? Skrim."

It had been a hardish battle to make up his mind to go back to Colonel Dare as if nothing had happened—a great deal had happened that he resented with all the animus of his nature—but he had definitely won that battle. He had wished to spare Lucy the unpleasantness of going back to the scene of his arrest and trial, and to start his married life fair and square in a new place and with a new set. But he had come to the conclusion that his wishes were things to be avoided, and that his uncle's counsel was sound. He owed Uncle Ben much—more than he could ever repay—and he was only too anxious to please him, apart from other considerations. After all, it did not matter where he went, so long as Lucy was happy. She was to have

had the casting vote; the position was not materially altered, and the decision should remain with her still.

Mrs. Flight thought him uncommonly uninteresting the next time he dined there, and fell asleep sooner than usual. Then, when he and Lucy were practically alone, he told her all, omitting nothing but his own wishes. There might be war; there might not; no one knew, and no reliance could be placed in newspaper reports, which were at present all "ifs" and "buts," "unlesses" and "in cases."

Colonel Dare and Ghoojeram were the alternatives, for Uncle Ben had said that to exchange elsewhere would be an unmanly thing to do. Ghoojeram was many hundred miles from the possible scene of action; but still those in the country would naturally run a better chance of employment than those ten thousand miles away, and the recent news, had he known it at the time, might have reversed Uncle Ben's opinion.

"What do you mean by employment?" she asked.

He hesitated a moment, and then: "Well, seeing active service in some shape or form."

"And do you mean to say that you want to take me to India to leave me all alone out there while you are away fighting and perhaps getting killed?"

Put like that, it did seem a selfish thing to suggest, he said. But he was not suggesting it—merely trying to decide the best thing to be done. Of course she was ambitious; of course she wanted him to get on in his profession; and here was a chance, an off chance certainly, but still a chance that might never occur again. "When a woman like you," he declared, meaning every word he said, "tells a man

she will follow him to the world's end, and that she is ready to undergo, for his sake, the little disagreeables that every soldier's wife must expect, she is in earnest. I know that. I know what you would do for me. But I hope never to see you suffer discomfort—there need never be occasion, luckily. If the worst were to come to the worst, my going away for a month or two would only mean a trip to the Hills, where I know a number of nice people who would be kind to you, and that at some time a long way hence most probably."

She wanted to interrupt him, but he would not let her speak until she had heard both sides of the question; but, after expatiating on his conversation with his uncle, he pulled Mr. Skrim's telegram from his pocket and handed it to her.

"Oh, but I really think your uncle is right," she said when she had read it; "he thinks it the manly thing to do to go back and meet Colonel Dare as if nothing had happened"—she used Uncle Ben's very words—"and I think so too. I don't mind meeting him, Jim, really I don't—not a bit. I don't mind that stupid court-martial; it doesn't matter in the least; besides, you should certainly keep good friends with your uncle."

And so it was decided. He thanked her for her loving interest, said she was a sound, sensible woman, called her a number of very pretty names, and tore himself away.

But somehow he did not wish to put in writing the evidence of his refusal to go to India, so he answered Mr. Skrim's telegram in person. The agent received

him coldly. "Oh, indeed," was all he said when Vraille told him he had decided not to exchange at all.

"I am sorry to have troubled you," said Vraille, who was always polite when he was not thinking of something else; "and no doubt some one will take Ghoojeram."

"I effected an exchange yesterday," said Mr. Skrim, taking a penknife from his pocket and proceeding to pare his nails; "you did not ask for the refusal of it, and left my telegram unanswered."

"Gone already?" exclaimed Jim, with something

like a pang of regret in his heart.

"Snapped up," said Mr. Skrim tersely.

It did not matter. He had made up his mind beforehand; and, having made up his mind, tried to believe himself thoroughly happy. He met Lucy at the photographer's, and either the prospect of having her picture taken, or the news of the fall of Ghoojeram, or both, made her look more radiant than ever. He was enchanted.

Happy is the man with a mind made up! and, if only peace had been probable instead of war, Vraille would have been the happiest man loitering about London.

However, he devoted himself to his idol, tried to forget all rumours of war and disquieting telegrams, and so got through the time. The marriage settlements had been signed; the banns proclaimed for the second time; Vraille had secured the services of a bachelor friend, Lucy of three spinster ladies not quite so handsome as herself. The day itself had been finally fixed; everything had been arranged, except the details of

the honeymoon. Vraille was in favour of some quiet little spot in Devonshire, but gave way to Lucy's preference for Paris—there were beautiful things to be seen and bought in Paris, she said. Paris was decided on.

It only wanted a week to the day, and he was told to keep away from Cabstand Square as Lucy was very busy with her trousseau. He had very few preparations of his own to make—presents to buy and commissions to execute for Lucy, and a stock of books on military subjects (for he had made up his mind to read hard in the winter evenings) to lay in. Spinning these occupations out as much as possible, they only helped to occupy two days; and he was beginning to wonder if the intervening five would ever pass, when he received a letter from his major which made him jump as if he had been shot before he had read a dozen words.

"We are ordered to hold ourselves in readiness for foreign service," the words ran, "and all leave is cancelled. You must, I am afraid, come back, unless you can arrange at the War Office for a fortnight or so. Under the circumstances they'll probably give you that much grace. Your orders follow"

This was cutting the Gordian knot with a vengeance! How would Uncle Ben take it? What would Lucy say? There was no need to frighten the girl, so he just sent her a message saying he would look in in the evening, and then hurried off to Bedford Row. He spent an hour or two with his uncle, and the effect of the interview was printed in rather large type upon his face when it was over. He looked sad and serious as he left the office, and, having secured a fortnight "on very urgent

private affairs," sat in an arm-chair in the club smoking-room, thinking "how the deuce" he was to break the news in the least disagreeable way to Lucy.

It was by no means an easy task. At first Lucy thought he was joking, and would not listen seriously; but, when she realised that he was in earnest, she flashed out with—

"It's too bad; it's too bad! You promised me faithfully you would not go. You have broken your promise. Why should I spend a week's honeymoon in a pokey little place I never heard of? I can't, and, what's more, I shan't. I've been made a fool of, and I won't stand it."

He seemed to be dazed at first, and for some time stood before her dumb, as if convicted of a crime, without a word to say in his defence. Indeed, he felt horribly guilty. She had every reason to be vexed; and this was the time of all others to be kind and considerate. He tried to be kind, and began to say some soft, soothing things. But she did not want his kindness; he had treated her shamefully, and she turned away, refusing to be comforted. Then he tried to reason with her, remembering that it was essential to be patient.

"But, my darling," he urged, "I have nothing to do with my going. I no more expected all this yesterday than you did yourself. I am ordered."

"Then you must get out of the order somehow, if you want me to marry you. I'm not to be treated in this way. It's a shame! a shame! I believe you knew all along."

"Indeed, indeed, Lucy, I did not."

"Well, exchange then; you were anxious enough to exchange until your uncle dissuaded you."

"I cannot now. I must go, even if—even if I go alone."

"And that you certainly will, as far as I'm concerned."

"You don't mean that seriously, Lucy?"

"I do, I do;" and she began to cry. It was mortifying in the extreme. The sheen of her wedding-dress was dulled; her beautiful trousseau was useless, and all her pretty new frocks; her bridesmaids would no longer envy her; the nice little wedding was robbed of all its fascination; the trip to Paris and the pleasant garrison life at home were no more. Oh, it was a shame! It was ridiculous and absurd of Jim to say that they could honeymoon all their lives. Those were not her ideas; and if she could not be married properly, she would not be married at all, which last sentiment she expressed aloud.

"Is that your last word, Lucy?" he asked, with no kindness in his voice now, nor yet impatience, but only sadness.

Yes, it was her last word, and he moved toward her, saying he would come and see her before he started.

"When I come home again—" but the thought was too much for him, and, flinging his arms round her, he exclaimed, "No, no, you don't mean it, sweetheart; you can't mean it. I cannot—cannot help myself. You are punishing me unjustly. Tell me at least that you are sorry for me."

She was not mollified, and wrenched herself free. She was too engrossed with her own great disappoint-

ment and sense of injury, to be affected by either argument or entreaty—much less to be subdued by useless demonstrations of affection, which only tended to increase her anger.

It was an unequal battle. He was suffering heavily, and was on the point of being not only vanquished but utterly routed, when an ally arrived on the field in the nick of time and saved the catastrophe.

Mrs. Flight had often done her daughter good service in her day, and now, with the instinct of an old soldier and the quick intelligence of a military genius, she took in the whole situation at a glance, and saw pretty well what was wanted. A word or two put her in possession of the facts, and a question or two decided her how to act. Vraille was hopelessly worsted and useless; that was evident, so she ordered a retreat.

"The news has upset her, poor girl," she said to him, "and she has not been herself all day. Better leave her to me, Jim, now, and by to-morrow she will have quite got over the shock. She is inclined to be a little hysterical," she whispered, leading him toward the door; "but it's only the over-excitement of the wedding—all girls are the same;" and she pushed him gently from the room.

But he felt that it was not a case of "to-morrow;" he had received his congé. It was all up. Like everything else in life that he had set his heart on, he had failed within an inch of success, or succeeded only to find out that he had better have failed. There was nothing to be done but to pack up and leave London the next day. What should he say to people—and to Uncle Ben?

But Mrs. Flight, meanwhile, was fighting his battles for him, and she meant to win. She no sooner heard the front door banged behind him than she turned to the attack.

"You stupid, stupid, selfish girl," she said; "what have you been saying to make him look like that? How much have you got to retract to-morrow?"

Lucy was sitting before her on the sofa, not crying, but sulkily picking the hem of her handkerchief.

"I said I would not marry him, and I won't," she replied, but in a tone not nearly so decided as that she had used to Vraille.

"Do you know what he has settled on you?" asked her mother. "Do you remember the things he has given you? Are you aware that the trousseau you think so much about is to be paid for by him? Have you no conscience, no pride, no self-respect? In return for all he has done for you, you abuse him for things he cannot help; he is too good for you—much too good. Lucy, he is a fine fellow. I will do nothing to persuade him to marry you—nothing; but write and tell him that you are heartily ashamed of yourself, you shall, and this very evening, too. If he likes to forgive you, well and good; but don't expect any assistance from me. I mean to act perfectly honestly by him, for I like him."

Mrs. Flight knew her daughter, and rightly calculated on the influence of her own strength of will.

Having broken down the enemy's defence with this sudden rush, she pursued her advantage, and soon put all opposition at an end. She declared that Lucy's repugnance to India was childish and absurd. India

was a matter of course for all soldiers, and sooner or later India was bound to come; it had come sooner, that was all. She would not allow that her daughter had any excuse for her treatment of Jim, for which she must, and should, apologise, whatever else happened.

Mrs. Flight had right on her side, and a good cause is a powerful weapon; in the end she won a signal victory, and Lucy sat down to write her letter.

Vraille could only read the written words of that letter when it reached him; he could not read the thoughts behind them. He could only see the terms of endearment and protestations of contrition, which were all the sweeter for being somewhat ungrammatically expressed. He kissed the letter and followed in person one of his own that he had written and sent the night before.

Now had peace and beatitude not been thus restored; had Vraille been hard-hearted enough to refuse forgiveness for the unkind things that had been said; had Lucy adhered to her original determination, as most women—especially beautiful ones—usually do, then James Vraille would have gone out to India, moped for a while, married some one else, and his story would have been entirely altered from that moment. But peace and beatitude did reign; Vraille was not a bit more resentful than other men madly in love with a beautiful woman; and Lucy was weaker, let us say, than the generality of her sex.

And so there was a gay wedding—a "pretty" one, the three bridesmaids called it—after all. Mrs. Flight kissed the last of her series of sons-in-law; Uncle Ben, resplendent in a favour as large as his voice, presented his new niece, as he called her, with a neeklace that made her eyes glisten, and his "boy" with a cheque that made his open with surprise.

All was as it should be, and Lucy Flight left her name behind her in the church in Cabstand Square for ever, and drove away with happy Jim—Mrs. Vraille.

CHAPTER IV.

YOUNG FOLKS AT HOME.

It was April—no showery, sunshiny, first-one-thingand-then-another sort of April, such as Lucy had always looked upon as the proper prelude to Easter and a new gown, but a blazing, scorching, piping April about which there was no uncertainty: it meant the hot weather, and meant it in earnest.

The thermometer was rising higher and higher every day. The heat was intense. But Jim said that it was nothing to what they might expect later on. Nothing? Why it was insufferable; she could scarcely breathe. The punkah was not working half enough; that wretched coolie always left off pulling directly she fell asleep. Perhaps he thought she was asleep still; she would soon let him know that she was wide awake—and Mrs. Vraille summoned her ayah, who deferentially received an angry message and softly departed to deliver it. For five or ten minutes the punkah flapped furiously, and then subsided into its former noiseless and graceful swing. It was Lucy's first experience of hot weather in the plains, and she was unaccustomed to the ways of punkahs.

It was horribly hot; but, after all, India was not half such a disagreeable place as she had imagined it would be when she left England. Jim had been lucky

enough to be sent to a large central station where there was plenty going on—a delightful place, with a kursaal, a gymkhana, tennis, cricket and polo grounds, bands, gardens, a club, a theatre, a beautiful ball-room, a Government House, and some of the most charming men in the shape of A.D.C.s that she had ever met. More than all, she herself was very popular, and had formed quite a little circle of her own that encompassed her about whenever she showed her face in public. She had made a sensation directly she arrived; the women had one and all admired her clothes, by inference if not openly, and had hardly yet left off asking her questions about the latest London fashions. As for the men, she held a little court almost every day; they flocked round her carriage in the Mall, and vied with one another in their attentions; they would leave any one to come to her, do anything to please her, give anything to dance with her: she reigned supreme. garrison at home was no doubt delightful, but the delights of a garrison at home were paltry compared to those of an important Indian cantonment. She had always been admired, even in London, where there were so many beautiful faces and figures to contend against; but here she was a queen, an undisputed queen. Every one was so free and easy; there was no stupid stiffness about Indian society, and the easy mode of life, so different to what she had expected it would be, had been a source of pleasurable excitement. The novelty of these things was beginning to wear off certainly, but still she had spent a thoroughly enjoyable time.

Of course she had! India is kind to young married women, and by its special attentions to them does its

utmost to make amends for the disadvantages of matrimony in such a climate. White women are at a premium, and are valued; but matrimony is a serious matter with a steadily declining rate of exchange. With the rupee at one-and-sixpence, and a thousand eyes watching one's every movement, it is hardly safe to dance too often with a girl until she is some one else's girl. Then it does not matter. The girl's business in India is to marry. That done, she is free to enjoy life to the utmost, and every man's duty to help her to enjoy it. India is the country par excellence for young married women. It was conquered for their benefit! Its spinsters are graciously allowed to skim over the surface of its pleasures, but only its young matrons are entitled to plunge into the vortex of its delights. Mrs. Vraille's mind was not of that order given to reasoning, but rather to taking conclusions for granted. Being not only pretty but lovely, she enjoyed the fascinations of social India, and, without questioning the why or the wherefore, was only greatly gratified that it was so.

She was the most lovely woman in Asia!! Mr. Rook, that promising young civilian, had told her so; and Mr. Rook knew what he was talking about. He had come out on board the same ship with them, and how devoted he had been! It was absurd of Jim, who knew nothing about him, to pretend he did not like him. Mr. Rook was a pleasant and decidedly useful neighbour. There could be no possible objection to her riding with him occasionally. Jim was uxorious—that was the word Mr. Rook had used—uxorious. She had intended to look that word out in the

dictionary to see what it meant, but had forgotten or been too busy.

She was her own mistress, too, with carriages and horses of her own, money of her own, settled on herself for her own exclusive use, so that she could order out from England as many things as she pleased without consulting any one, which was convenient. Oh yes, altogether she had spent a delightful winter—cold weather they called it.

But now the cold weather was gone; Jim said that in another week or two the tattis would be in the doors and windows and the thermantidotes at work. There was no absolute necessity for her to wait till Jim's leave. Why should she not go to the Hills at once? Jim could easily follow on afterwards. She would put the idea to him; he would do anything she asked him. Over and above that, he was dull company, with his languages that were impossible to understand, his books that no one but himself and his moonshee cared to read, and his drills that she had long since tired of watching. Ah, how soon a married couple settled down to familiarity and commonplace prosiness! He used to talk a great deal about a perpetual honeymoon, but of course that was all nonsense, and theirs had been an absurd honeymoon. They were now just like any other husband and wife; and husbands, she knew-all her married friends told her so, apart from her own experience—were creatures to be managed; well managed, they were most useful. Every one said she managed Jim well, and yet she was not conscious of having given herself any particular trouble in the matter, but supposed she had a peculiar aptitude for managing all men—it seemed like it, at any rate. Women she had never very much cared about.

She longed to see the Hills again, now that she was well and strong and able to go about. weather before she had not had a chance, cooped up as she had been in the house all day, going nowhere and seeing no one. And then the child had been such a tie that the summer had slipped away without her having done anything worth mentioning or even remembering.

Lucy Vraille, "the most beautiful woman in Asia," as she lay stretched under her punkah, lazily watching its monotonous sway, and giving herself up luxuriously to these reflections, richly deserved the greater part of the extravagant epithet bestowed on her by Mr. Rook. Marriage had enhanced her loveliness, and as yet no extremes of temperature had tampered with her complexion; if anything, the healthy outdoor life she had been leading had improved it. An artist with any sense of colouring and appreciation of the poetry of form would have been glad of such a model at any time; but to have caught her then, in all the luxury of indolent repose and unstudied abandon, would have driven him well-nigh mad with professional delight. She was indeed a fair subject for a picture—a theme for a poem—a heroine fit to adorn a fairy tale—a study wherewith to point a moral.

It was a pity that such a woman, who ought at least to have been a Viceroy's consort, should be thrown away upon such an uninteresting and mediocre fellow as Jim Vraille. So every one said; and so, probably, Lucy was thinking as she looked at him standing in VOL. I.

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the doorway. What a contrast! What a disenchantment his appearance cast upon the whole scene. A few hours before he had been spic and span enough, dressed in his spotless white clothing. But now it was begrimed with dust and dirt, crumpled and creased; his face was smeared with streaks of dust, his sword was rusted by the sweat of his horse's flank, his boots had lost all polish, and his helmet its unsullied pipeclay surface. He was very hot, very dirty, very unsightly, and, amid such dainty surroundings, a monstrous incongruity—a blot that robbed the picture of all its charm.

He looked at his wife with intense admiration for a moment, and then touched her cheek with his lips; just touched it, no more, for Lucy pushed his face away. But she could not push his heart away; he was foolishly in love with her, and he said so; that had made him forget himself.

"There, don't come near me till you're clean," she said—at once a natural and sensible remark. Lucy was always natural and sensible where self was concerned.

He had been up since daybreak, and had been kept in the lines longer than usual; he was famished, he said, and would be ready for breakfast in ten minutes. But, before leaving the room, he walked over to a little cot standing at the foot of his wife's bed, and looked at a little face lying on a pillow no whiter than itself. A little wailing voice had made itself heard through many hours of the past night, and the child, worn out with heat and weariness, was sleeping late. Its little limbs were spread out wide; it was not sleeping, as children in England sleep, "cuddled up," but with tiny legs

and arms outstretched in a manner that spoke pathetically of the heat.

"Poor little beggar," he muttered, bending over the cot; "we must get him to the Hills." Then stooping lower still, and with a look of sudden concern, he began to examine the child's face attentively. He dropped upon his knees, and inserting his finger between the little pouting lips, forced them apart, and took something from the child's mouth. It was but a speck of brownish substance, but after looking at it closely in the light, and smelling it, he called the ayah into the room with a voice full of angry indignation. showed his finger to the woman and spoke rapidly in Hindustani to her. She protested with many vehement gesticulations, to which he paid no attention, but, pointing to the door, repeated twice a word which Lucy knew meant, "Go."

"No wonder he sleeps soundly," he said angrily to his wife, "he's been drugged with opium. They will do it, if they're not watched."

"Well, how was I to know?" Lucy asked.
"No, no; of course not. I've sent that woman about her business, and I'll see about getting an English nurse; but, Lucy, the poor little chap will want all your attention. It's a bad country for children at best."

He was always interfering about the baby, but she thought it wise to say nothing, and only showed her resentment by pouting; for Jim had discovered the cause of those heavy sleeps which always succeeded the child's outcries when they were prolonged beyond a certain time, and for which she had never before been fully able to account. His idea of procuring a really responsible white nurse was an excellent one, and in applauding it she expressed surprise that it had never occurred to them before.

Vraille, in the plodding, persevering way that was daily becoming more customary to him, set to work to institute inquiries, and, after much advertising and research, at last discovered a woman in the place itself whom he thought might suit. She was the widow of a corporal who had recently drunk himself to death; she was far from handsome, but was without encumbrance, and bore a character for sobriety and honesty. Jim sought her out and questioned her as to her intentions and inclinations. Her intentions, she said, were regulated by official arrangements, and she supposed she would be drafted home with the next batch of time-expired; her inclinations were to do as she was She had no particular hankering after her native land, as her relations were all dead and she had lost touch with her friends; but she had no desire to stay in the country where, as she said, "she had no one now to do for." This frame of mind seemed propitious to Jim's scheme, and he asked her to call upon his wife that evening. The hard-featured widow of Corporal Foresight said she would do so, but would bind herself to nothing.

It was not exactly the place of a captain serving on full pay in a royal regiment to be touting for nurses, and people tittered when they heard of it; but he had ceased to study appearances, and the only thing that troubled him was the thought, every now and again, that, though Lucy could not be expected to understand Indian ways and customs, still she might take interest all the same in his efforts to benefit their child. It surprised him that she did not seem to care about it more.

He told his wife of the appointment he had made for her, and Lucy said she would be sure to be back from the gardens in time to keep it, but that he had chosen rather an inconvenient day. He did not himself care much about the gardens, and after a day of Sanscrit roots preferred a game of racquets as a means of clearing away the cobwebs weaved in his brain by the patient moonshee.

He returned home before Lucy, and found Mrs. Foresight seated in the verandah with the baby on her knee. The baby was the key to the situation which the good woman contemplated taking, and she appeared to be reconnoitring before deciding on her course of action. Judging from the way in which they seemed to understand one another, she had evidently been studying his traits, talking to him in his own language, and otherwise endeavouring to become acquainted with his general character.

"I'll take on," she said, rising to her feet with the baby in her arms when she saw Vraille. "I'll take on, if I suit the lady, who's not at home after I've walked three blazin' 'ot miles to see her; and you may strike me off the establishment as soon as she comes in an' approves o' my transfer."

This woman was rather an oddity. Her face was as hard and sharp as the corner of a street, and her figure about as graceful as a lamp-post's; but there was a pleasant softness about her eye as it fell on the baby that won Jim's heart, and, in spite of the ramrod-like

rigidity of her person and the directness of her manner, he determined to give her his support with his wife. Lucy, when she discovered that Mrs. Foresight was a good needlewoman, raised no objection, and the corporal's widow was forthwith attached to Vraille's household as nurse, lady's maid, needle-woman, and general factotum, under the name Judith. She preferred, she said, to wave her own flag than to sail under colours that had never done her very much credit.

In less than a week Judith had relieved her mistress of all care connected with the baby. She gathered him to her arms and took him away. She kept him out of earshot when he was cross, and only brought him into his mother's society when he was good; at night he now slept under Judith's punkah, and Lucy's rest was no longer disturbed by his pitiful little wailings and constant demands for attention. This was a great relief. A marked difference began to show itself, too, in the child's general conduct. It ate more and cried less, it slept at regular times, and slept well; it even crowed and cooed sometimes; it was quite a pattern baby, and Judith a pattern nurse. She was also invaluable in other ways-dress-making and mending, acting as matron and housekeeper, taking charge of keys and cupboards, looking after the native servants, and, as Lucy put it, making herself generally useful. Indeed, she saved her so much trouble that Mrs. Vraille began to wonder how she had ever been able to manage without her.

The most valuable characteristic of this woman was her endurance of heat; she seemed to mind the heat no more than the punkah-coolie did, whereas poor Lucy was quite incapacitated from taking an active interest in anything but the bachelors' ball that was to be given before the place became an utter abomination of desolation from the now rapidly increasing exodus of celebrities. After that event she thought that she too, like the other best people of the cantonment, would like to get out of the raging, maddening heat.

When Jim came in one morning from the lines, dirty as usual, and told her that he should not be able to get away so soon as he had expected, as his major had decided to take first leave, she thought it high time to make definite arrangements for her own departure immediately after the ball, and determined to

lay her plans before him that very day.

When he was clean and cool and white again, he joined her at breakfast. The meal left nothing to be desired, and had been prepared by a cook whose wages were not inconsiderable. They were waited on by a stately Khansamah, whose glossy blue-black beard never showed more than one day's growth of white, and dignified Mahometans in scrupulously clean linen, with the Vraille crest and motto on a badge in their turbans. The Khansamah was Lucy's stand-by, and he could speak English quite well enough for her purposes. Everything about her was well ordered and good of its kind. She lived in good style—as good as any of her neighbours, she was proud to think. Their bungalow was one of the best, and, what was more to the purpose, one of the coolest in the station. They had quite a stud of horses in their stables, and carriages of all sorts in their coach-house. Jim had been as good as his word, and Lucy had little to complain of; he had given her all he promised, and was daily gratifying fresh wants.

Beside his plate lay the morning pile of letters. From the number he selected his own, which were few, and handed the remainder to Lucy. She had many correspondents; but he, as a rule, scarcely any. It was mail day, however, and had brought the usual weekly letter from Uncle Ben.

It was not very sociable of them, but, instead of talking, they read their letters. Lucy, after shuffling through hers quickly, glanced across the table at her husband, and slipped one of them into her pocket unopened; it was a little matter that would keep, and she wished to read it afterwards. It had been easy to smuggle it away without his seeing, for he was absorbed in his own correspondence. His forehead was puckered and his brows contracted; his face seemed to have grown visibly older in the last five minutes; the wrinkles were all showing in rigid, clearcut lines. He was getting to be quite an ugly man, Lucy thought, as she looked at him; but, at any rate, he was a delightfully simple one.

He looked up and smiled faintly, then asked her her news. She had none, except that a box, which she was anxiously expecting, had been delayed.

"What box?" he asked.

"Why, a box of dresses—I told you a long time ago—but you are always mooning or moonsheeing" (she seldom joked, but this was such a palpable pun) "instead of listening, or you would have remembered. You take less interest in my appearance, Jim, than any one in the place."

"Some of these servants," Jim said in very bad French, "understand English."

"Well, what if they do?" she replied in her own tongue. "It's true, and they want no telling. We have not a taste in common."

She was annoyed about her dress; but, apart from that, how true was her remark, how utterly and deplorably true! She, even she, who was not preternaturally quick, had divined the truth long ago. They had not a taste in common. His conversation was about "Higher Standards" and "Sanscrit specials" and other subjects of a similarly abstruse nature which she could not be expected to understand; nor did she try. His ways were not her ways. If he made love to her, he did so gravely, instead of gaily, as love should be made; he was always talking of ideals and objects and aims in life—looking ahead at ends, as he called them, instead of enjoying the present like any other sensible being. In place of amusing himself and making himself agreeable to the people who came to the house, he would often leave the room while they were there, and not return until they had gone. He had been positively rude to Mr. Rook on more than one occasion; and, when he did go to a ball, he wanted to dance with his own wife, which was absurd. Then, again, at other times, he was always wanting her to accompany him alone, and hanging about her apron-strings when he was not wanted at all. A married woman was a married woman, and Lucy had become a married woman on purpose to enjoy the independence of the position. It was not fair. She was disappointed in Jim; he had not turned out as she expected.

He said nothing in answer to her remark, but smiled a feeble smile.

She would wake him up a bit, and force him to take interest in her by broaching the subject of her immediate departure to the Hills. "I've got a plan," she said.

"A plan?" he echoed.

"Yes, a plan; that's what I said. I'm off to the Hills directly after the bachelors' ball."

She had roused him at last. "I fear that's impossible, Lucy," he replied.

"Why impossible?"

"I can't get leave,"

"But I can."

"It would do the little chap all the good in the world," he muttered.

"And it would do me all the good in the world, too. Anyway, I'm off."

"Lucy, Lucy, think!" he exclaimed, and then in a lower tone continued, "think of the journey and expense."

"Expense?"

"Yes. If you and the child go now, it will mean keeping up a double establishment. I've got this house any way until July. I have been disappointed about my leave. The hot weather is not unhealthy, and I had intended taking two months, or three, if possible, from the end of June; but now my plans may be all upset. We must think about it; you must give me time to think about it."

His peculiar dreamy tone irritated her. She disliked contradiction, too, and spoke up like a brave woman—

"You've got from now until the ball, nearly three weeks, to think about it. Will that do?"

"Three weeks; oh, yes, plenty of time—plenty of time. You see, Lucy, your expenses last year were very heavy."

He was not even listening to her; he was thinking of something else as usual. "What has that to do with what we were talking about? You are a rich man, are you not?"

"I was," he said; and then, pushing away his plate, he rose and left the room. He was pre-occupied, and when he was pre-occupied he was rude.

CHAPTER V.

HOT WEATHER.

HE was in trouble—in evident trouble; and he wished to be alone with his trouble, a very unsatisfactory state of things for a married man, a young one especially. Why did he not seek consolation from the partner of his joys and sorrows? There had been a time, once, when, instead of brooding over a trouble alone, he would have rushed with it at once to Lucy; and there had been a time, too, when he would have poured out his heart impetuously to his wife without waiting to weigh his words or consider the consequences. That time had passed; it had glided imperceptibly away. He was not conscious of when or how the change had been effected, or even that there was a change at all. never occurred to him that he himself had changed, still less that Lucy had; but little by little he had begun to be more cautious in approaching her with his hopes and fears, more and more fearful of vexing her, or, as he would have called it, of paining her. It was merely the natural drifting apart of two wholly dissimilar minds, a social phenomenon that no bond however apparently indissoluble can counteract. He had begun to believe, if he thought about it at all, that there are many topics, too many, that a man cannot discuss with a woman, even if that woman is his

wife; many feminine interests a man, even a husband, cannot understand. He had often tried to understand his wife and had failed, and so he supposed that she too had tried to understand him with as little success. She was no more to blame than he. They loved one another, he presumed, as much as ever, and that sufficed. Ah! yes; that sufficed. He was getting older; his impetuosity was cooling; his keen sense of pleasure was becoming dull; the edge was gone, somehow. And how impetuous he had been! taking every question to her straight and expecting her to understand; seeking her sympathy because he was proud of commanding it; loving her simplicity, and thinking only of her fondness for him—but that time had passed. It seemed to have been so long, long ago that he caught himself doubting sometimes whether it had really ever been at all, and whether it had existed only in his imagination. But surely no! Surely the thought was unworthy; there must have been truth as there was reality in those happy evenings spent in Cabstand Square. And yet those times were somehow gone.

What should he say to her now? how break the news? How would she take Uncle Ben's letter? A man could never tell how a woman would take anything—much less a woman like Lucy. Two years' acquaintance had helped him little in guessing at the course she was ever likely to pursue. But perhaps she would show her true colours in adversity and "come out strong"—most likely, women often did; and he had never yet seen Lucy under adverse circumstances.

As nothing was to be gained by delay, he determined

to strike while the iron was hot, and, finding Lucy in the drawing-room writing letters, went up to her, and, putting his hand on her shoulder, said softly—"Lucy, dear, come and talk to me a little; I've something important to tell you."

"I'm very busy," she said, hastily covering her letter

with the blotting-pad; "can't you wait?"

"Yes, I can wait," he said slowly, and, taking his hand off her shoulder, picked up an envelope addressed, "Herbert Rook, Esq."

"I should not have more correspondence with this man than I could help, if I were you," he continued.

"Why not?" she asked.

"Well, he's a loose sort of fish, I think—not quite straight."

"Do you know anything against him?"

"Oh, no, only that is what I think."

"My dear Jim, I don't really believe you know anything about it; he's received everywhere, and, if you would only try to make yourself a little pleasant to him, you'd get to like him just as much as every one else does."

"Well, well, I dare say you are right. What are

you writing to him about?"

"Oh, nothing; only a picnic he is getting up." It was a very small picnic, consisting only of himself and his great friend, young Hale of the cavalry, as joint hosts, Mrs. Palmira, young Hale's special admiration, and Lucy (if she would come); so small that it was not worth her while to enter into particulars.

Jim put the envelope down and walked away. When she had finished writing her acceptance, she joined him

under the punkah, and, dropping wearily into a loungechair, said, "Well, what is it?"

"I've had very bad news, Lucy—very bad indeed."

"You're not going to be ordered away from here, are you?"

"No, no; it's about money."

She turned a shade paler, and made no reply.

"My money," he continued; "I'm afraid, from what my uncle says, that I've lost a great deal."

Lucy regained her composure, and the colour crept back into her cheeks again.

"I cannot tell you how grieved I am that this blow should have come so soon after our marriage. Until to-day I had not so much as a suspicion, indeed I had not. You know that, don't you, dear? I would have cut off my hand sooner than deceive you about a single penny. However, thank Heaven, your money is all right."

"How much have you lost?"

"Lucy, if this news I hear to-day be true—and I fear it is—I've lost the equivalent of half my income."

He drew his hand over his forehead, and Lucy said, "Oh, what a nuisance!"

Then, holding Uncle Ben's letter open before him and glancing at it occasionally, he attempted a rough explanation. She listened and tried to understand. But when, after a time, details had been entered into more minutely, and it appeared that servants would have to be discharged, horses and carriages sold, a less expensive house rented, and various other unpleasant means taken towards retrenchment, she fairly lost all patience.

"I don't understand your shares and stocks," she

said, "I don't know what you mean by securities and bank dividends; but I know that I never did like that Uncle Ben, as you call him, and always thought you were a great deal too much under his thumb."

Jim looked surprised. Then he attempted an explanation in vindication of his uncle's character, but it was up-hill work. In vain he pointed out that his father, and not his uncle, had invested the lost money, and that a bank failure was an eventuality impossible to foresee. Uncle Ben had himself lost heavily through the same cause, he said; but that was no argument.

"How do you know he has?" was all she asked.

For answer he handed her his uncle's letter; but she declined to read it, saying, "Oh, of course it's very easy for him to say so," whereat Jim declared that her insinuations were ill-natured and absurd, and she told him not to lose his temper.

It was not that she would not, but that she could not, understand. She could neither divest her mind of the belief that Uncle Ben was at the bottom of all the mischief, nor comprehend the significance of their loss. So many thousand pounds! The figures were figures and nothing more—an expression merely—a computation in round numbers of which she could not realise the detailed importance when placed before her in bulk. Had the money been taken out of her purse in driblets, had its value been reduced to yards of trimming which she could see, or its loss computed in hours of boredom which she could feel, then she might have understood her husband's worried expression. But, as it was, she dismissed the subject as dull, and began to discuss the Hills again as soon she got a chance.

He listened apathetically, neither acquiescing in her arrangements nor raising objections to them; but he did not again allude to his uncle's letter or to the news it contained.

"You are not attending to me," she said at last;
"you don't even seem to care whether I go or not."

He was terribly sorry for her; she would feel the consequences of his loss far more than he; and more than all he regretted the apparent violation of all the promises he had made her before their marriage. It had been his custom all through life, when in doubt or trouble, to seek counsel of his uncle. Now he felt the want of the old gentleman's advice and sympathy more acutely than he had ever deemed possible before his marriage.

A man, even a strong-willed man, which Vraille was not, likes to talk a trouble over; the mere fact of discussing it takes the edge off it somewhat; discussion being as good for the mind as confession for the soul. But he was not a man to wear his grievance on his sleeve or cry it in the market-place, and, so, with as much show of resignation as he could muster, set himself to work to meet the coming alteration in his circumstances. But he did feel the want of Uncle Ben's advice and sympathy in his strait; he was alone with his worries and his account-books.

There was much to arrange—many details to be gone into; and in all matters of domestic economy he was forced to consult Judith. Lucy, when he questioned her, invariably referred him to Judith. "Oh, Judith manages that, you know," she would say, or "Judith has the keys," or "I handed all my books over to Judith." To Judith, therefore, he applied, and

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never applied in vain: she knew all about everything, and it appeared to him was able to render an exceedingly good account of her stewardship. What would his wife do without Judith? he thought. Still, it was only fair to let her know that their mode of life would have to be conducted for the future on a sensibly reduced scale. This he asked Lucy to do, but, as she forgot, did it himself.

"Do you mean," Judith asked him, "that you're about rejuicin' me wages?"

"No; certainly not," said Jim, flushing up, and wishing with all his heart that he had not meddled in matters so purely domestic.

"Because, if that's your bother," she continued, "I'm willing to stay on without any till times improve. I've got sorter fond of the child, and don't want to leave him yet a while."

She said this in a semi-defiant way, clutching the baby to her and tossing her head so violently that she nearly tossed off the huge sun-hat she was wearing. All her movements were jerky and mechanical; she was a wooden woman, like a Noah's wife out of a toy ark. Her brown holland dress was straight and stiff, without any attempt at embell shment or decoration in its composition. She was a hard-faced, hard-bosomed, hard headed soldier's widow who had not seen better times, and yet Jim Vraille, the whilom London dandy, found a sympathy in her vulgarity that he had never yet discovered in all his lovely Lucy's elegant refinement.

"Whatever happens, we must try not to part with Judith," he said to his wife that evening.

"Part with her! of course not; she's a most useful woman."

"She is a thoroughly good woman, Lucy, and we ought to be very kind to her. She has not a friend in the world, and never complains; she has not a pleasure in life, unless it's that boy, and never thinks of pleasure, but does her duty honestly and to the very best of her ability. Ah! it often occurs to me what lessons fine ladies—and fine gentlemen, too—might learn of humble people whom they think not worth their notice."

"But Judith is by no means a humble person, let me tell you; not nearly so humble as a servant should be, I think. She often lays down the law to me about baby, and once she had the impertinence to tell me that if I did not have him with me oftener, he would forget me. As if a child would ever forget its own mother!"

Jim sighed.

"The most beautiful thing in all nature," he said, "is a mother's love for her child. Marriages, they say, are made in heaven; but very few are, Lucy, I am beginning to fear, judging from what I see in this place of husbands and wives. No; a mother's love for her child is the only really heaven-born emotion; that is perfect, unselfish, sacred. Judith told me once that she had an only boy like little Jim, and that he died just as he was beginning to know her and call her by the name that women most like to hear. She cried, poor woman, when she told me. It would pain you terribly to see our little chap growing up loving his nurse more than his mother. That is what Judith meant, and perhaps if he were with us more it would be a good thing. You see, she is naturally very fond of

children, and "—he continued smiling—"she is a dangerous rival for the little chap's affections."

"So am I fond of children," Lucy exclaimed; "but I like them with me at the right times and in the right places—not in the drawing-room, for instance, or when visitors are here. But, à propos, have you settled yet when we are to go to Simla? The heat is really more than I can bear."

This question had been put to him twenty times a day for the past six weeks in the same form and with the same persistence. He had answered it with the same evasion every time; he did not yet know whether he could manage it; he was doing his utmost—in any case, Simla was out of the question as too expensive.

"I shall be able to tell you definitely next month," he replied. "I can't get leave myself, as the major has gone away sick; still, a change would do both you and the child good. But, as I have told you before, I do not wish you to go so far away as Simla."

"And why not?"

"I have given you my reasons many times, Lucy."

"What nonsense!"

"Nonsense or not, I am afraid I mean what I say."

"And I mean to go."

"Look here, Lucy," he said very quietly, "I have already told you my wishes; as they are disregarded, I must tell you, once and for all, that I do not intend you to go to Simla. I have never, since we have been married, refused you anything you asked me or thwarted you in a single wish; but, as I now consider my reasons good, I thoroughly intend this once to exert my authority"—the word had a peculiarly un-

pleasant ring about it—"and I shall let you go when and where I think best."

She was amazed. This was the man whom she had led every one to believe she could twist round her little finger. She would have her own way—she must

"I shall talk it over with Mrs. Palmira," she said, "and tell her what you say."

"No, you won't, Lucy, if you are wise; a woman who takes her home grievances abroad to air gets laughed at for her pains. Besides, what could twenty Mrs. Palmiras do? But, apart from all that, surely your pride, your affection for me, your sense of honour would prevent you from discussing with others things that only concern you and me."

"Me, you mean," she interrupted indignantly.

"What concerns you, concerns me; it is the same thing. Wait a little, dearest, have a little more patience, and you will see that I am right. Just wait until I have made the necessary arrangements, and then we can see how the land lies. Look here, dear, I can explain to you in five minutes, and you ought to know."

But she would not listen, she was hurt and indignant, and did not believe any arrangements were necessary.

Nor did she believe that any changes would in reality be made in their mode of life, and was quite surprised when, at the end of the month, a number of servants were discharged. It was not until her two carriage-horses had been sold, and her landau put up to auction, that she seemed to understand that her husband was not so rich as when she had married him. Then she began to complain, and to resent the curtail-

ment of her amusements. She was being made a fool of, she pathetically exclaimed, before the whole place. It could not be helped, Jim said; she had her Arab, he his charger, and with the dog-cart and pony they would have to manage until he was promoted and things looked up again.

But things did not look up at once. Jim left off playing polo, and Lucy was obliged to use Mr. Rook's saddle-horses much more frequently than formerly. Her weekly allowances for household expenditure were cut down—not that that signified much in itself, for the grave Khansamah still remained, and she could still order, Judith managing the rest; but, having outrun her private account, and with nothing to fall back upon, she was obliged to arrange matters with an accommodating Schroff in the bazaar, to whom Mrs. Palmira had introduced her, saying he was good for five thousand at any time, and very discreet.

The incessant gaiety of the cold weather had departed and given place to the humdrum routine of midsummer amusement. A gallop sometimes before breakfast, a long, weary day, a drive to the gardens in the evening, an occasional dinner-party, now and then a small dance; that was all. Government House was no more; its inmates had fled, all the best people had left, and those that remained were for the most part too listless to entertain. Oh! it was horribly hot—hotter than poor Lucy had ever imagined even India could be; the nights were as hot as the days; the winds—that was the curious thing—instead of cooling the air, blew across the scorched country like blasts from a furnace, and necessitated the shutting up of every

crevice in the doors and windows throughout the house during the day. Worse than all, her skin was losing the bloom for which it had been famous; the terrible heat was literally spoiling her complexion. It was a shame!

To her friends she accounted for the altered condition of her household by explaining that henceforth she would take up her permanent residence in the Hills, and, so far as the plains were concerned, would only be a bird of passage. She was only waiting, she said, to make a few final arrangements to be off. No one believed her, for in India, where it may be almost said that one's inner consciousness and the whole outside world are only divided by a "chic," every one knows everything about every one else as a matter of course, and Jim's story, once she had confided it to her friends Mr. Rook and Mrs. Palmira, was patent to the whole station.

"I want to go to Simla, that's the truth," she said to Mrs. Palmira, who was her confidente and general adviser.

"Easily do that, my dear," said that handsome leader of local fashion.

"Jim won't let me; but don't tell any one that, it would sound so ridiculous," said Lucy. "What shall I do? I want to go, and I can't afford it by myself."

"Try crying," suggested Mrs. Palmira.

"I've tried everything, and he only says, 'You must wait."

"Try Ramchundar Bux, and come with me to Tainee; it's a capital little place."

"Ramchundar Bux was rather rude when I asked him for five hundred the other day, and threatened to tell Jim."

"Did he give you the money?—that's the great thing."

"Yes, he gave it to me in the end; you see I intended to pay him something this month, but found I couldn't."

"Well, give up the Simla idea, and get 'a go' of

fever."

"Get a go of fever?"

"Yes, to be sure; headache, lassitude, cold chills, loss of appetite. No Jim in the world—especially your Jim—could withstand that; and then come along with me to Tainee, brat and all; we'll have a capital time. Young Hale, my own peculiar, is coming, and I dare say Berty Rook will look us up."

While Lucy was turning Mrs Palmira's suggestions over in her mind, Jim suddenly told her that he had taken rooms for her at an hotel at Tainee, and that she, Judith, and the boy should start the following week.

"Oh, that's the very thing I was going to suggest to you, Jim dear; Mrs. Palmira is going too. Oh, whatever made you think of Tainee, I wouder; oh, how delightful!"

"I'm glad you're pleased, sweetheart," he said, smiling. "I wanted it to be a surprise. Go, my darling; go and enjoy yourself. If I can't get leave in August, you can stay till then; if I can, I'll join you there for a month."

So, in due course, Lucy joined Mrs. Palmira at Tainee, and set to work enjoying herself as much as she could within the small limits of its small society—it was a very unpretentious place, but cool—while Jim remained behind to superintend the movement of his household goods into his new and smaller house.

The fierce summer blazed on, and Jim's life varied not one whit from day to day. He struggled on with his moonshee, drilled and disciplined the battery for his absent major, settled himself in his new house, dined at mess en garçon (which he found, rather to his surprise, he thoroughly enjoyed), and read his Bagh-e-bahar and Baital Pachchisi assiduously. Then dust-storms swept the country; the clouds banked up and burst in peals of thunder. The monsoon broke and the rains poured down. The treacherous Indian autumn had commenced.

The war that had brought so many beside himself to India was practically over; the retreat was being carried out. Two years before his heart had beat excitedly at the scare of war; he had come to India full of hope. Scare had followed scare; but not for months after his arrival had war been actually declared. He had applied to go-thousands had applied-and now the war was over, and he had missed it. He need have been in no desperate hurry, after all. But his thoughts had ceased to dwell upon those things; the soreness of his court-martial had passed away somewhat; he could even think dispassionately of Colonel Dare; and his high hopes had dwindled down to examinations in the vernacular and periodical inspections. The battery had given him plenty of employment, and he was interested in the work; his examination he meant to read for in earnest now, and pass if he could. In spite of three or four attacks of fever, he lived on cheerfully, forgetting all unpleasantness in the past and looking forward to his wife's return as the happy ending of a leaveless summer and the happy beginning of a season of enjoyment.

She came at last, radiant, happy, lovely—all her health and strength restored, the bloom of her beauty as fresh and charming as it had ever been.

She was full of her doings and amusements; she had spent a very pleasaut time, she said, and had enjoyed her stay immensely; but Tainee, she averred, was rather a dull place, and for many reasons she was glad to get back. She did not add that an outrunning of the constable beyond immediate hope of capture had curtailed her visit: that was a minor reason which would probably explain itself in time.

There were now, as Lucy said, only a few weeks of moderate heat to endure, and then—then the winter season would begin with all its attendant gaiety.

One by one the various celebrities began to return, and Lucy hailed each fresh arrival with delight. Soon the place began to fill rapidly, and the leading spirits announced a subscription ball in the Kursaal. Then callers became more and more numerous, until Jim began to feel that the lonely hot weather he had spent was indeed a thing of the d.smal past.

The rains had ceased, and the sun shone out with some of his past ferocity, as if spitefully reluctant to part with his power. It was hot still, and fever was abundant.

Little Jim, who had come back from Tainee so altered in appearance and improved in intelligence that Jim had hardly known him, began to lose his colour again. Instead of sitting up in Judith's arms, looking about him with eyes full of wonderment and interest, as he had done at first, he began to whine and

whimper, dropping his head upon Judith's shoulder and refusing to be amused.

"Oh, I don't think it's anything," Lucy said; but Judith feared something was the matter, and Jim went for the doctor. The doctor confirmed Judith's fears: little Jim had a slight touch of fever.

This unfortunately happened the day before the ball, and, instead of getting well during the night like a considerate child, little Jim woke in the morning hot, fretful, and evidently unhappy.

The evening came. The ball dress hung upon a wicker stand in Lucy's room; Judith had put the last few finishing touches to it, and Lucy was standing by, glancing alternately at it and her own face in the glass. It was a beautiful dress—a far more beautiful face.

She was ready dressed when Jim came into her room in a lamentable state of preparation—or want of it.

"Why, Jim," she exclaimed, "you're not ready, and the carriage is at the door."

"The doctor has just been, and he says the boy is not so well to-night—far from well, in fact. Lucy, I'm afraid he's worse than we thought."

"Why, he's only a little feverish; he'll be all right in the morning. I heard the doctor say, over and over again, that we need not be the least anxious. But do go and get ready, there's a good fellow."

"I don't wish to go to-night, Lucy."

"Not go!"

"No; I couldn't. I couldn't be away when the poor little chap is ill; he might get worse."

"This is too ridiculous!" Lucy said, with tears of disappointment starting to her eyes; "it's too annoying. We could easily be sent for if we were wanted; it's not more than a mile."

"A mile might make all the difference; but if it were a hundred yards I would not, could not go."

"The doctor said there was no cause for anxiety."

"I have none—as yet."

She argued and protested and implored, but it was no use; Jim was as firm as a rock, and, as she told him, as obstinate as a mule. She could go if she liked, he said, there was not the slightest reason why she should not, but he would stay at home.

"And mind the baby," she sneered. She was fast getting angry at his persistence.

He did not answer.

"Do you expect me to go there alone in an open carriage?" she demanded.

"I have got a closed one for you; but I'll drive to the door with you, if you like."

"A nice state you're in to drive to the door; and I can't wait while you dress. Will you come later on?"

"I will not promise, Lucy."

"You want to stay at home and flirt with Judith," she laughed contemptuously.

"Poking fun at me will do no good," he replied; "and you are wasting time."

His coolness exasperated her. "No," she cried, "no one would accuse you of flirting, if they do of other things," and she flung out of the room.

The very walls rang with her words as he sat alone trying to read, but listening instead for sounds from the other side of the house; the very walls repeated her words and echoed and re-echoed them, flinging them in his teeth as she had done. The whole scene of his court-martial, the face of the president, those of the members and witnesses, rose up one by one before him, and he could hear the accusation against him slowly repeated over and over again a hundred times. He could hear himself pleading his innocence, now before the court, now before his uncle: he could hear himself protesting it to Lucy. He could remember every word of her answer to him then, and now——

He made his bearer stay within call outside his window; and, as the clock on his mantel-shelf struck each half-hour, he visited the room where his sick child lay.

The night wore on.

In the distance he could just catch the faint echoes of the dance music, close at hand the wailings of his child and the soothing songs that Judith was singing to it. He was a sad man that night. It was pitiable to see the tiny fingers clasping and unclasping themselves in petty misery; pitiable to see so small a thing suffering so much; to feel the heat of its little body; to watch the blinking eyes trying vainly to close in sleep; to hear the piteous little cries and to know that nothing could be done in answer to their meaningless appeals. It was a sad experience to look at the puckered lips and flushed face. But there was another and a sadder experience that honest Jim was to suffer in addition.

The night wore on.

The music became more and more distinct as other

sounds died out of the breathless air; but a noiseless thing was speeding on its way throughout the length and breadth of the land, from bazaar to bazaar, from mouth to mouth, on wings swifter than those on which the telegraph can fly—a thing that spreads and spreads, covering thousands of miles in a single day, no one knows how—a thing called news.

The night wore on, and Jim sat and watched.

The baby's cries were getting fainter; the strains of the happy music louder. The doctor, in full evening dress, had called for the second time since Vraille's watch began, and his report was favourable. The news that had started at sundown was spreading, spreading, spreading, getting nearer and nearer every minute.

The night wore on.

The grey mists were curling over the ground. The last few bars of the last waltz were being played, and the ball was nearly over. Judith's voice was still. The news was approaching.

The morning broke, and the sun had fairly started on another of its brilliant courses. The child was sound asleep; Judith was dozing. All was well: the bearer in attendance might go.

The watcher rose from his chair and listened. There was a voice at the gate which he recognised as Herbert Rook's, and in answer to it Jim heard his wife say, "Good night—or morning rather."

She stood before him, a vision of dishevelled loveliness. His bearer rushed excitedly into the room—

"Sahib, Sahib! Great news! The tribes have risen in revolt and massacred the white envoy. The war will all break out afresh!"

CHAPTER VI.

HIS CHANCE.

THE sleepy summer awoke into activity. The treaty proclaiming peace had been ignored; England's envoy had been murdered, and the war that had already cost so many lives must now begin again. Throughout the length and breadth of the land flashed incessant orders; the very air seemed to breathe of preparation; staff and departmental officers talked of nothing but organisation; concentration and mobilisation followed; occupation commenced before evacuation was complete, and retreat recoiled into advance. The dusty columns wending their slow way back to India, decimated and inert after their famous return march, were met by fresh faces eager for the horrors of which they had only heard but never seen; the trains rolled in and discharged their freights; the great trunk roads were occupied with marching men and congested with incessant traffic; and even the rough tracks leading to the front were soon crowded with troops and stores, vehicles of all sorts. lumber and impedimenta, driven cattle and beasts of burden. One thought dominated the minds of men; one desire impelled them in one direction; their one desire was to advance. From the pleasure resorts in the cool hills men flocked to join their stations; out from home they came, struggling to be first in the field, eager for active service.

Obedience to orders was not enough, applications for employment in any capacity filled the post-bags and were delivered in shoals. Vraille among the number wrote his letter with a trembling hand and took it to his major.

"What you too?" asked that officer, laughing; "and how about the young 'un?"

He did not ask, "How about your wife?" which struck Vraille as odd; but the fact was that there was a general impression in the station, though Vraille did not know it, that Mrs. Vraille was a woman well able to take care of herself.

"I won't apply if you don't wish it," said Jim, slowly; "but there seems little chance now of our being sent, and I should like to go."

He put it in that way; but if he had said he was burning to go, calculating every chance, living in hourly hope of being sent, he would have spoken no more than the truth.

"Most of us would like to go," said the major.

"Most of us have no bad mark against our names that we would like to wipe out." He was getting excited, and in another minute would have flashed out in one of those old impulsive bursts of passion which were so far less common with him now than formerly; but the major cut him short.

"Still harping on that old grievance," he said; "it's idiotic. But look here, if you're bent on this business I think I see my way to help you. I've got now in my pocket a letter from an old friend of mine, asking me if

I can recommend a man of certain qualities and character for his personal staff. He's a curious old fellow, you know, very touchy upon certain subjects, and prides himself upon his independence; he binds me to strict secrecy; still I am obliged to ask if you would accept such an appointment if it came your way."

"Accept!" cried Jim, starting to his feet and waying his application in the air. "Accept! only try me!"

"Well, well, don't get excited, and don't chuck that letter away; give it to me and I will send it on. I believe they want men for the Transport, and you may as well have more irons in the fire than one."

"This is most awfully good of you," said Jim, twirling his moustache nervously and trying his utmost to appear calm.

"Tush," said the other, "I owe you a good turn, Jim, that's the truth. You've done your work like a man, and pulled the battery through the hot weather and some decidedly difficult official worries pluckily and well. Hallo! what are you blushing like a girl for?—it's a silly trick you've got, old fellow, and doesn't become you."

Praise is sweet. Jim felt its sweetness all the more for its rarity; it was the first time he had heard any reference to his work. He could never take his troubles or successes home with him, for Lucy could not understand his difficulties, she told him, and objected, she said, to having stable-talk brought into her drawing-room. Balls and dinners, dresses and tennis tournaments, were suitable subjects for discussion, but not

"shop." Well-tutored as he fancied himself in the ways of the world, he was childishly simple enough to be pleased at praise. He felt his folly and blushed.

"You did my work for me while I was away as I like it done," continued the major. "You are a reliable fellow, though compliments are not much in my way, and I shall submit your name."

This man had formed his own opinion of his captain, and was glad of a chance of practically expressing it.

Vraille jumped upon his horse and galloped off. His chance had come; he knew it, he felt it; his reputation, perhaps his brevet, was as good as gained. Lucy would congratulate him; she would be pleased, and think more highly of him than ever when he told her of the compliments that had been paid him. Ah, it was worth the long, long months of weary work; it was gratifying in the extreme to have its worth acknowledged. He felt proud of himself, and happy to think that his wife would be prouder still. He was happier then than he had been for many a long day, for somehow life lately had not been altogether linked sweetness long drawn There was always a feeling in his heart that something was wanting in his home, something missing; and Jim was bothered with the thought that that something must be due to a cross-grained trait in his own uncomfortable character, which it was his bounden duty to discover and rectify, but could not. He was. not a ladies' man; he had not the knack of putting things in an agreeable or interesting way, so that his wife cared to listen. When he talked, he always seemed to be talking over her head, which was pedantic. He

had tried reading aloud his favourite authors to her, but she said he always selected the wrong time for doing so, and his utmost elocutionary efforts only resulted in producing boredom. His ideas of romance were not hers, and at one time he had really imagined himself so very romantic, and marriage the acme of romance. Marriage had opened his eyes to that and a great many other of his mistakes. "Mea culpa, mea culpa," he had sung so repeatedly that he believed in the moral of his song. "How about the young 'un?" his major had asked. Well, as he thought it out, he felt pretty certain his fault did not lie there. In his younger days, he had never been partial to children; indeed, he had lived far too rapidly to give them a thought. But this child, he was surprised to find, occupied more and more of his thoughts with each succeeding day. Puny, feeble little bit of humanity that it was, it partially filled that void which in his foolish fancy he was always imagining existed in his life. The sight of the boy in Judith's arms at once pained him and tended to assuage that unaccountable hungry longing his heart so often felt. What idiocy! What did he hunger for? Was it love? Surely not. Had he not his wife? And did he not love her? With his whole soul, he knew it.

He drew up at the door-step of his house and threw the reins to his syce. As he walked across the hall he sighed. In the short interval of time between riding from the lines to his bungalow his spirits had dropped from exultation to something like despair. Who could like a man with a temperament so absurdly mercurial as that? He found his wife in the drawing-room, and, seating himself beside her, took her hand in his and kissed it. She looked surprised.

"What is the matter?" she asked, stretching herself lazily and looking lovely as she did so.

"Lucy darling," he began, then stopped.

"Well?"

"I've some good news."

"For me?"

"N-no, not exactly; about myself."

"Passed your examination?"

She clasped her hands behind her head, and tilted her knees so as to bring the book on her lap into a position where she could read it.

"No, Lucy, I've not been up for my examination yet, you know, and in all probability never shall now; something better than that."

She lifted her eyes off her book as he stopped.

"I'm going to the front," he said shortly.

"When?" she asked.

"Directly, I suspect;" and then he told her all that he had heard in the morning, but cut his recital rather short, as he saw that her eyes wandered repeatedly in the direction of her book.

"Oh, you're not gone yet," she said when he had finished.

"But when I do go it will be at a moment's notice, Lucy, and it is as well to be prepared. I was thinking—I was thinking, dear, that it would be a good opportunity for you and the boy to take a trip home and recruit. Perhaps your mother——"

"No thank you!" she exclaimed hurriedly. "I

have not the least desire to go home. I'd far rather wait in the Hills till you come back."

"Very well," he replied thoughtfully; "only, Lucy, a hill station is a dangerous place for a young woman to spend her time in alone—a young married woman, I mean. People are-very censorious out here, and don't mind much what they say. You are a very, very beautiful woman, my darling, and beautiful women excite jealousy. From sheer ignorance you might get yourself talked about in a way that, if you only knew, would horrify you. Many and many an innocent woman has had her character torn in shreds in the Hills without her suspecting it in the least. Your danger, my dearest girl, is your innocence, and it is better for you to know at starting what to expect, that is all. I can trust you, thank God, anywhere—anywhere; but it is other people's honesty I distrust. Never give them a handle to catch hold of, however slight, or they'll use it to a certainty, and to good purpose."

"Why, you silly man," she said, "I know all about that—probably a good deal better than you do your-self."

"If you knew—you do know, Lucy—how jealous I am of your every look and word, you would not laugh. It is absurd of me, I know; but the thought of leaving you and the boy—our boy—alone, has—has knocked me out of time," he concluded, lamely. "The thought," he continued, throwing one arm round her neck and bending his head down to look into her eyes,—"the thought that I might some day come back, as other and better men than I have done, to find my

wife different to what I left her, is absurd, isn't it? Say so; say it's absurd, Lucy!"

"Of course it's absurd," she answered in rather a frightened voice.

"It would break my heart. You'll never forget me, or cease to think of me as having been kind to you sometimes. You won't let the admiration of other—" he had almost said "men," but substituted "people"—"steal your love from me for a single moment, will you? And, Lucy, the little chap; you'll look after him well, well, won't you, while I'm away?"

He caught one of her hands, and his own trembled as he held it; his mouth was twitching, his eyes flashing that peculiar flame which always frightened her a little. His compliments were gross, his manner almost fierce, and certainly embarrassing; besides, his insinuations were insulting and made her angry, although she was afraid to show anger. Certainly he was not a pleasant sort of husband, and a man, after all, not so easy to trifle with as she had always supposed. She made her promises to him categorically and wished that he would leave her alone

Presently he rose, and asked whether the boy was asleep, then, renewing his admonitions of strict secrecy concerning the promised appointment, left the room.

One other incident added to a thousand that had gone before, proving the difficulty of getting his wife to take more than a casual interest in his affairs, and his own incapacity to impart enthusiasm or any other emotion to a heart that he grieved to think beat separately from, though not exactly out of unison with, his own; one more rasp at the link that bound them

together; one more tug at his faith; one more twist at the instrument of torture that he felt was slowly crushing the vitality out of him! Poor Jim was very despondent as he walked across to the other side of the house where the nursery was. His way lay through his wife's bedroom, and a ball-dress lying on her bed reminded him that there was another dance that night. Why was it that he no longer seemed to care for all these gaieties? Time was when he had never seemed to have had enough; and not so very long ago, after all—about the time when Uncle Ben had told him that he might call himself lucky if, at forty, he could count his friends on the fingers of one hand. He had laughed then, for he had believed that the value of those five would be as nothing compared to the worth of one whom he was about to gather to his heart. He was not forty yet, certainly, but where were those five that Uncle Ben had talked about? Uncle Ben himself —one, yes; his major—well, yes, two. The third? Oh! what did it matter? Where was that one?

Judith's honest face met him at the nursery door.

"Well, Judith, how's the young 'un?"

"Beautiful, bless 'un," she replied.

He sat down on the floor beside his child and began to make a series of extraordinary and unsoldierly noises with his mouth for its amusement. The baby was but a baby, and could only express his appreciation in a wide-eyed stare; but presently something like a ripple of merriment passed across his pale little face, and Captain James Vraille, R.A., grinned with delight.

"Lord love 'un," cried Judith, "blessed if he didn't nearly smile."

"I think he did quite," said Jim with animation; "never saw him do that before. How soon do babies smile as a rule, Judith?"

They discussed the question for some time, Jim meanwhile making more noises and grimaces, until a call from her mistress summoned Judith from the room.

He had not been able to tell Lucy of his major's expressed gratitude for his summer's work—and for the moment he had wanted to tell some one—but he soon forgot his own wants and wishes while prattling to his baby.

In this way was Jim's egoism always checked, and his confidences gradually stifled until they had almost ceased to exist at all.

He played with his child until Judith came back and said it was time for it to go to bed; and then Jim went away and had no one to play with, no one to talk to. He busied himself in his room looking over his things and putting on one side what he thought suitable for a field kit, until Lucy called to him that it was time to dress for dinner. They were to dine with the Commissioner—a big gun, who could on no account be kept waiting—and afterwards they were to go to the dance. The dinner was of course an important matter; but the dance was expected to be a very dismal affair—so many men had left for the front.

Vraille had been cautioned on no account to miss going, for trousers were at a premium. He, therefore, found himself in course of time following his wife's trailing skirts into the Commissioner's handsome drawing-room. After shaking hands with their host and hostess, Lucy sank gracefully into a chair, round which half a dozen men immediately clustered, while

Jim, in a corner, began to assume the various attitudes affected by men during the mauvais quart-d'heure when they have no one near them to talk to.

It was five minutes past the appointed dinner-time, when a girl, whom he fancied he had met before somewhere, entered the room. While he was cudgelling his brains to recall her name, the Commissioner's wife sailed towards him, and, motioning with her fan, led him across the room and murmured an introduction to the unknown. He did not catch the name, although he listened with all his ears, but it sounded like "Clare."

She wore pince-nez and held herself rather haughtily erect. That was all he had time to notice before she held out her hand to him, and in a low yet frank voice, with just a suspicion of rippling laughter in it, said, "This is a very pleasant surprise, Captain Vraille. Not a week in the country and I meet an old face. Eight thousand miles are nothing, after all."

Jim expressed his gratification as best he could, wondering who on earth she was, and hoping he could recollect (he felt he was on the point of doing so every moment) before he should be obliged to ask her name. The tailing off in strict order of precedence gave him time to collect his memories, but he found himself taking his seat next to his short-sighted companion as much at sea as ever. Luckily he knew the lady on his other side, and whispered the necessary question.

"Miss Dare—Miss Edith Dare—daughter of Colonel Dare, whose sister, Mrs. Phelps, married Major Phelps of the Eleventh Horse, you know—just arrived—staying with her aunt—father ordered to the front—went through the day before yesterday."

Long before this full and accurate information (all information about people in India is full and accurate) had come to an end, the blood was surging through Jim's veins, dyeing his cheeks and forehead crimson and making him feel hot all over. He applied himself to his soup, and half turned his back on the girl it was his business to amuse and entertain. What should he do? What if she had noticed his horrible confusion? Why could he not comport himself calmly in a difficulty like any other man? He envied Mr. Rook his calm composure as he leant towards Lucy and smilingly whispered something in her ear which seemed to please her. He never had been calm and composed; he was an ass.

Still the matter had to be seen through somehow; and, after all, he had done nothing that he feared being found out, for all India knew his story. The girl herself of course knew it, and had met him very graciously. He finished his soup, drank a sip or two of champagne, ate a morsel of bread, squared himself in his chair, began a sentence, gulped it down again, coughed, and at last got out—

"And how do you like India, Miss Dare?" There was not another man sitting at that table, he thought to himself, who would have put such a confoundedly stupid question to a girl as that.

Miss Dare turned towards him, and in her low, pleasant voice, intermingled with that rippling laughter, which had at first struck him as sweet to hear but now sounded like soothing music, answered his silly question with a string of bright and interested replies. She recounted a little anecdote of her voyage, laughingly lamented the

heat, told him where she lived, supposed that people saw a great deal of one another in India, said she intended to make the very best of things and enjoy herself, and smiled as if she thoroughly understood what enjoyment meant.

Before dinner was half over, Jim found himself talking almost as freely as he could talk to Judith Foresight. Somehow they had got on the subject of the baby, and just as he was saying, "He's a jolly little beggar, you must come and see him," there was a pause in the general conversation which rendered the remark audible to the whole table. Mr. Rook tittered into his napkin, the Commissioner smiled, Lucy frowned across the table, Miss Dare said boldly, "That I certainly shall, Captain Vraille; I expect from what you say he's a dear little fellow." But he had had enough of babies and changed the conversation. would only be polite, he supposed, to ask after her father. He did so, and discovered that the colonel was now a widower with an only daughter on his hands, namely Edith. "And then," explained Miss Dare, "his turn came for India, and we had no sooner landed than he was ordered to the front. He rushed off and left me where I am. He was in a tremendous hurry, too; he always is."

"He's quite right," said Jim, loyally, "to go on as quickly as he can."

"To be sure," she replied; "but he's impetuous, much too impetuous. Sometimes," she said very slowly, removing her *pince-nez* and looking her companion full in the face with a pair of honest eyes that he noticed were of hazel hue,—"sometimes he does things impetu-

ously which he has very good reason to repent afterwards."

He removed his eyes from hers and bent his head, pretending to pick a crumb out of his lap. He understood her perfectly; she, at least, had never doubted him, and she meant him to know it. Had his thoughts been put into words, they would have been something like—"She can't help being the old fool's daughter, and somehow she has made me feel uncommonly happy."

Then they talked about music and pictures, the latest London play and the last novel, until the ladies retired, and Jim was left alone to his reflections and

a subaltern's prattle about a polo pony.

In the drawing-room afterwards he had an opportunity of studying Miss Dare at a distance, though none of talking to her. He had already noticed that she was rather a plain girl; but she showed to more advantage while standing than when seated, for she had a slim, graceful figure, and her erect carriage made her look taller than she was. "Not at all a striking-looking girl," thought Jim, "though very far from a bread-and-butter miss-English, honest, and fearless; not a bit like her father;" and then he thought no more about her, but watched his wife with admiring eyes, taking mental notes of her superiority over every other woman in the room in point of loveliness and costume, and listening indolently to the idle chatter that was going on around him. Lucy's face, he noticed, was aglow with animation, and he felt a little pained to think how seldom she wore that becoming expression in his company. Some one asked her to play—she did so; Jim knew the tune well; it

was one of the six that she practised for such occasions. Then, to his surprise, Miss Dare sat down to the piano and began to sing. She sang from memory, and every one listened with unusual interest and attention. Through Lucy's performance all the ladies had talked, Jim noticed, as loudly as possible without actually shouting; now they were silent. Genuine applause followed the song, and the Commissioner's wife had the bad taste, as Lucy afterwards put it, to press for an encore verse. The girl looked up and smiled, ran her fingers up and down the keys, and suddenly burst into a wild German song that Vraille had never heard before. He did not know a word of German, but he felt certain it was a love-song, and it seemed to him a very sad one. There was a frantic misery about some of the wailing notes of the refrain which followed each verse that seemed to touch his inmost heart and melt it in pity. He had never heard such singing or such a song; he could hardly bear to listen; it made him utterly miserable; and, only a few minutes before, this same young lady had been making him feel as gay as that silly subaltern with his polo pony. More songs followed, but he heard none of them; and when, an hour afterwards, he was seated beside his wife, driving to the dance, he still heard those wild sad notes of misery in the trot of his horse's hoofs upon the roadway.

"Well," said his wife, giving him a push with the end of her fan; "we're very thoughtful to-night.

Miss Dare, eh? Never tell me again that you are not

a flirt."

"I!" exclaimed poor Jim, who had no more notion of flirting than of flying.

"Yes, you, injured innocence; and a pretty figure you cut at table. She was laughing at you, Jim, and trying her best to make you appear silly. She succeeded, too."

"Well, perhaps so, Lucy; and what then? She has not gained much."

But his wife had thrown fresh light on his understanding; he saw the table laughing at him once again, and blushed to himself in the dark to think that he had been so easily led into making an ass of himself.

"She's old Dare's daughter," he said; "the man that tried me, you remember."

"Naturally she owes you a grudge. Every one knows that."

"Do you think she was trying dodges on me, then?"

"Of course I do."

"Why? How?"

Reasons are not so easy to give as assertions to make, and Lucy changed the subject with—

"How should I know? Ask her."

All the harmony of the little German song was gone, and now the rattle of the horse's hoofs only beat out discords.

Considering the paucity of men, the dance was a great success. The band played its merriest, the waltzers twirled, partners perspired, the fun was at its height. Not a hundred miles away, fathers and brothers, husbands and sons, were toiling along the westward roads to glory or dishonour, disease or death; but what mattered that? In India of all places it behoves one to be merry while one can.

Lucy waltzed divinely, and never looked hot, whatever she might feel. She did not suffer either from prickly heat, which gave her an immense advantage over the majority of her sex, for she could wear her dresses low without fear of her shoulders becoming disfigured with a rash during the exercise. Others, for the most part, were not so fortunate. Mr. Rook, too, always looked sleek and cool, whatever the mercury might register. His close black hair never ruffled, his linen never got limp; he was a charming partner in every way, and when not actually dancing, could pay the prettiest compliments with an easy grace that gave them all the air of actual sincerity. Mr. Rook was a rising man, with influence, and a thorough gentleman, with two thousand rupees a month, so mothers liked to see their daughters dancing with him; but such is the perversity of disinterested human nature, he preferred dancing with Lucy. Lucy's popularity with her sex was not proportionate to the number of times he did so in an evening, and on this particular evening was rapidly on the decline.

It was not in the rooms, and only natural that they should take a stroll in the grounds. Jim saw the curtains fall behind the retreating pair.

"Who is that beautiful woman just gone out?" a voice behind him asked.

"No other than Lovely Loo, I suspect," another answered.

He turned sharply, and beheld two unknown faces. The place was full of unknown faces in those busy times.

Was she as well known as that? Did people dare

to call her by an offensive nickname? Was the reputation of her beauty bandied about from mouth to mouth like that of an actress at home? It was horrible. He could have struck the man. He would take her home, away from the reach of insult.

"Lucy, Lucy," he whispered, when he had found her after a search through the grounds, "I want to speak to you—just a minute."

She rose from her seat with an apology to her part-

ner, and followed him a few steps.

"Come home," he said, catching at her hand, "come home, dearest; we have had enough of this. It is intolerably weary work; you must be tired."

"Come home?" she repeated. "When the night has hardly begun? Why, I am enjoying myself immensely, and I'm not one bit tired. You mean you are bored. Come, don't be selfish just this once, there's a dear."

"All right," he said, and, flinging her hand from him, turned his back upon her and walked away.

"You don't look as if you were enjoying yourself as you should," said a musical voice in his ear, as he stood inside the room again, wearily watching the dancing.

"I'm not, Miss Dare, and that's the truth; I hate and loathe these masquerades—these hollow shams of amusement—these Indian hotbeds of insult and scandal. You'll find it all out for yourself some day. I'd sooner see paint than smiles on some women's faces."

"Good gracious!" said the girl, edging away from him.

Had he been enjoying his supper? Had her father been right in his accusations, after all?

"Don't think I'm mad," he said, smiling grimly, and noticing her action; "I'm not mad usually, but mad, perhaps, just now. Sometimes the unspoken lies of this country of so-called romance are borne in upon me very strongly, that's all. Why did you come here? What made your father subject you to a life in India? Has he ever soldiered here before?"

The question led to explanation, the explanation to a set of Lancers, the set of Lancers to no clearer mutual understanding.

He did not enjoy his evening, but Lucy did.

"You look lovelier and lovelier every time I see you," murmured her partner.

The delicacy of the compliment sent a thrill of pleasure through her.

"Don't be so stupid," she said deprecatingly.

"Hot weathers," he pursued, in smooth, even tones, "have no effect upon you, positively. How do you manage it? Give me your receipt, and I'll make my fortune."

She laughed, and said she had none.

"Of course not; one can see that with half an eye."
Do you never feel afraid, Mrs. Vraille, of all the bitter enemies you have made in this place?"

"Enemies! No; what enemies? Why should I?"

"Women hate you, my dear lady; and there are lots of women here, you know."

"Hate me, do they?"

This was gratifying to the last degree.

"If you want to make friends, Miss Aphrodite, be stupid; if you want to keep them, be ugly, or at any rate plain."

She had never heard of Aphrodite, but she felt that the allusion was well meant, and smiled.

"But I'm not stupid," she said.

"Precisely," he replied, dryly. "Now look here, dear Lucy--Mrs. Vraille, I mean; I beg pardon-I want you to manage something cleverly."

Lucy looked as bright as possible.

"I am thinking of giving a little entertainment in my bungalow—dinner, dance, supper, all premeditated impromptu"—he paused to give his little shaft of wit time to strike her understanding; but, seeing that it had missed its mark, continued—"but I want it choice; by choice I mean chosen, and very carefully chosen—the wheat winnowed from the chaff."

"Ye—es, quite so," said Lucy, dubiously.

"All unnecessary superfluity removed."

She was slow to take any hint, and he saw that nothing but plain-speaking would serve.

"No dull people, you know; no awkward chaperons, no tiresome fathers and husbands."

She would be delighted. When was it to be?

About a fortnight or three weeks hence.

"Oh, easy enough!" she exclaimed. "Jim will have gone by then."

"Gone? Where to?"

"To the front. He's been offered an appointment under General ——; oh! but I forgot."

A low, pensive whistle broke from Mr. Rook's lips.

"What's the matter?" she asked.

"Nothing, nothing; I had thought as much all along, that's all. But tell me the particulars; it is interesting, this."

She told him all she could remember, proud to let him see how clever she could be when she chose.

"But be sure," she said, "you don't mention it to a soul. It's a dead secret at present, though you seemed to have guessed it."

"Certainly not," said Mr. Rook, to whom the information came as an utter surprise.

No one, to hear his answer, would have supposed that the matter was important to him; and no one, to look at him, would have imagined that honest Lucy had ruined her husband's chance for ever.

CHAPTER VII.

GOOD-BYE.

THE Rooks are an ancient and honourable family. They are, too, a clever race, and, without exception, popular, it being a sort of etiquette among them always to live on the best terms possible with their neighbours, never to make unnecessary enemies, and at the same time to push themselves well to the front. They deserve to get on; and they do!

Of Lord Chesscastle's numerous younger sons, two had found their way to India. The Honourable Percy of the Guards filled a dignified position on the Viceregal Staff, while the Honourable Herbert, as we have seen, was a marked man in the Civil Service. But Percy Rook, as the family representative of the army, had a few decorations, and, if possible, a V.C. to get, before he could attempt to emulate the distinguished rôles played by his military forefathers; Herbert had yet to bring himself into prominent notice on a special mission. The family name was as good as ever, but could not be lived on, and the family credit in more senses than one was a little on the wane. The war offered golden opportunities to be snapped up, and the Rooks were on the look-out.

The brothers bore one another no extraordinary affection; but as they could slide up their respective scales in harmonic progression without interfering with

one another's interests, if either saw a fit opportunity of doing the other a good turn, he invariably seized it. keeping a debtor and creditor account of benefits received and bestowed, and making a careful mental note of the balance.

Naturally enough, Percy pined for a post that would offer the best opportunities of advancement and distinction with the least possible inaction and discomfort between whiles; and Herbert knew that his brother had set his heart on obtaining the vacant billet now being offered to this outsider Vraille. Mr. Rook, the civilian, understood diplomacy if he understood anything, and, better still, thoroughly understood the character of the general with whom the appointment rested.

An hour's cogitation evolved two diplomatic notes—one to his brother, the other to a wire-puller of no mean order, whom he knew tolerably well, and had once served to good purpose. He posted these notes, smiled complacently, and went to bed. The next day he told every one he met of the good fortune about to befall his friend Jimmy Vraille.

Herbert Rook was undoubtedly the most desirable acquaintance within a radius of five or six hundred miles. Every one liked him; it was impossible to help it; he had a sweet, soothing way of saying that it was hot in the sun or cool under the punkah, which at once suggested confidence and solicited sympathy, and he always knew the latest news sooner than any one else. He played a good rubber of whist, and to watch him at lawn-tennis was an education; he was a divine waltzer, an excellent horseman, and a most trustworthy organiser of dinner-parties, picnics, tournaments, or

concerts; he thoroughly understood menus and ball programmes; and, in fact, for dexterity and tact in bringing the right people together at the right times and places, and in the right order—an all-important consideration—as well as for amusing them when he got them there, he had not his equal in all India. He could turn a verse for an album, sing an Italian lovesong, playing his own accompaniment, paint a scene for the theatre, or take a minor part which no one wished to fill, with a grace and good-nature that made him beloved of all who knew him.

It was only natural that when Lucy found that her wit and beauty attracted an undue share of his attention, and saw other women in the ball-room or on the Mall frowning at her, she felt constrained to make the very best of her opportunities, and cement with her brightest smiles the intimacy that was springing up apace between them every day. It was delightful to sit out in the cool night air, between or even during the dances, and listen to his caressing voice, while in the mellow light of Chinese lanterns and fairy lamps she could watch the flash of jealous eyes less beautiful than her own. It was charming; and it was still more charming when, beyond the reach of captious ears, he would occasionally become bold, and burst forth into fearless rhapsodies on her attainments and her charms. He put things in a way that made them positively mpossible to resent; he understood women and how to charm them. He never talked about himself: he talked about her—that was the whole secret.

Jim talked about absurd things—ethics and ideals, fundamental principles and convictions, and a number

of other themes equally impossible to comprehend, and equally dull. Mr. Rooke was never dull; he understood life—the real every-day life of positive enjoyment in esse and possible enchantment in posse; he understood men and manners and realities, and how to make the best of them, too; he never droned out speculations on impossibilities, or looked upon the seamy side of things.

This little entertainment of his, for example, got up, he told her, especially on her own account, and being put off de die in diem (though her meditation was not in Latin) until she should fix a day most convenient for herself, was tempting in the extreme and occupied her thoughts. She must manage it somehow; but there were difficulties. For one thing she would be obliged to have a new dress for the occasion, and, though ordered, the date of its completion was still uncertain. But she had not as yet mentioned the subject to Jim. He might make some ridiculous objection which would give rise to a little scene; she hated little scenes, and hoped by procrastination to avoid the necessity of forcing one into existence: the time taken by Government officials in making up their minds was monstrous.

At last Mr. Rook could wait no longer, and himself fixed the date and issued his invitations—verbally. She wanted to go, but kept putting off the day for obtaining Jim's sanction. People were beginning to talk of his appointment; it was extraordinary how things got about. She heard some one allude to it on the Mall; then again at the Gymkhana the subject had been mentioned in her hearing. A young subaltern—rather a friend of hers—named Hicks, congratulated her, and said that he was "dead nuts" on her husband's

charger Mustapha, and, "if there was to be a deal, meant to cut in."

It certainly was getting about; still, as Jim was evidently ignorant of the fact that he was a subject of conversation, not to say interest, for the time being, she held her tongue like a wise woman. He, meanwhile, was making every preparation for immediate departure, busying himself all day long with one thing and another, and looking positively brisk and cheerful.

"There," he said to her one evening just before starting for the theatre, "I'm ready now to be off at a

moment's notice."

"And quite glad to leave me all alone."

His face fell.

"I'm very sorry to leave you," he said, gravely, "more sorry than I can tell you."

"Oh, yes!" was her ironical reply.

"Not all the telling in the world, I fear, would make you believe me, Lucy."

She noticed the bitterness in his tone, and told him

not to be cross and spoil her evening.

"But," he continued rather wearily, "at least you will appreciate the arrangements I have made for you while I am away." Then he told her. She was to live on where she was until the commencement of the hot weather, when she would proceed to the Hills. He had all his plans—houses, disposal of furniture, domestic arrangements, and the very journeys to and fro—cut and dried, it seemed. She was quite satisfied, and much interested, as he had said she would be.

They went to the theatre, and Lucy thoroughly enjoyed her evening after all.

The news of Jim's possible selection for the vacant appointment was by this time common property, and when some one at last congratulated him personally on his luck he looked scared. Lucy, when he asked her if she had repeated to any one what he had told her, at first stoutly maintained her innocence, for Jim put his questions to her, as she affirmed, with such brutal ferocity that he frightened her; but afterwards, when he had calmed down a little and could listen to reason, she admitted having partially alluded to the possibility of his filling the post, knowing full well that in doing so there could not, of course, be the slightest atom of harm. Jim sighed, and said he hoped it would be all right.

He went on hoping until he saw the appointment of Captain the Honourable Percy Rook of the Body-guard in the "Gazette."

"It's no good, Lucy," he groaned, "trying for anything in the service without interest; it's no good working or hoping; you might as well try to swim without arms—you can keep your head above water, but you can't get on an inch. I'm sorry you said anything about it, as it so happens, because it has made us both look more or less foolish. But that did not lose me my chance, and I'm not so unjust or so stupid as to suppose it did; it was my want of interest, for one thing, and the star I was born under, for another. It's a pity, but let us try to forget all about it."

He did his best to forget all about it; but one day his Major jogged his memory most unpleasantly.

"The thing got about somehow," he said to his Captain, tartly; "it got to General ——'s ears that

you had been selected on my recommendation and authority. All the good you've done by tattling, when I warned you not to, is to have lost a capital billet for yourself and get me a nasty snub. I don't like snubs."

Jim took his wigging silently. What could he say? He had committed an indiscretion and knew it. His Major would not be likely to trust him very implicitly for the future—and Lucy? Well, she had meant no harm, and, as he had exonerated her once, it would be ungenerous and of little use to raise the question again; besides, he did not believe that a stray hint could possibly have done the whole mischief, even in India. No, it was his luck!

In due course Captain the Honourable Percy Rook, whose departure was duly chronicled in the daily papers as a subject of universal regret to Simla and general congratulation to the Field Force, rolled down the Himylayan Hills to take up his new duties on the Frontier. Captain James Vraille, occasionally sympathised with, took to his books again, and opened the "Baital Pachchisi" at the place where he had left off.

One man's gain is another's loss in any game, be it skittles, billiards, stocks, or war. The best go to the front, the weak to the wall, the one difficulty being to decide at the outset who are the best—a difficulty that can only be overcome by individual comparison. Comparison is arrived at by competition; competition is a great institution, but unfortunately James Vraille was no good at competition.

"I don't wish to complain," he said to his wife one

night when they happened to be at home alone together; "and a man who grumbles about his luck is usually a knock-kneed sort of chap, but it does seem hard sometimes that one thing after another should fail me. I suppose I'm an example of my own rule, and am morally weak. I hate failure," he exclaimed—this was only a few days after his resolution to forget his disappointment—"and to hate anything is a proof of weakness. Really strong men don't hate, or if they do, they keep their hatred under control, and don't talk about it. The man I should like to be is the calm, cool, quiet man who manages to get on without noise: the less noise a steam-engine makes, the quicker it goes; it is only at starting and pulling up that it puffs and blows; and ——"

"Oh! but I've often heard an engine make a lot of noise going quick—indeed I have," said Lucy; "whistle, for instance."

"There may be anguish in the whistle," he muttered to himself, "but not hatred."

"I don't believe you know anything about engines, as a matter of fact."

She rose out of her chair, and, stretching her shapely arms above her head, yawned, but yawned enchantingly as an animate statue of a weary Venus might yawn.

"Oh, I'm so tired," she said. "I've been up three nights running, you know, and I'm going to bed. Good night, dear."

She patted his grey head as she passed him and left the room.

There is something wrong about the man whose principal companions are his thoughts. Jim was very

often left alone with his thoughts, and sometimes he felt that if he could only give them expression instead of always bottling them up he would feel better, morally and physically. But the more he thought the less he wished to talk; and it seemed, too, that he was always thinking; the habit was growing on him apace—a pernicious habit, but one he found it impossible to throw off. A gape, a momentary digression on Lucy's part, was quite enough to dispel his ideas and banish all hope of fixing her interest. It was absurd of him to be so sensitive, and he struggled hard against his infirmity. But it was no good, his efforts were invariably failures; and little by little he felt that he was becoming more and more silent, more and more taciturn, more and more socially objectionable. .

He often reviewed his past life, and wondered whether the gaiety of his fastest days had in reality been forced-whether the laughter and noise and fun of those times had ever actually formed part of his life. The old feeling that he had once tried to explain to Lucy, of living within himself a life different to what others saw, was growing on him rapidly. He was never himself now; he was always acting a parttrying to keep up appearances which he knew were false. Those subjects that really interested him were never mentioned at home, while things he knew nothing about were eagerly discussed by Lucy and her friends. But now and then, in the mess, and occasionally at the Club, he would launch out into a dissertation or join warmly in an argument and talk until he felt ashamed of his volubility.

His weekly letter to Uncle Ben was his safety-valve; in these letters he said what he thought, and said it freely; it was like talking to him, and Uncle Ben had always been a sympathetic listener. His uncle wrote back and told him that "over-much self-examination was the bane of existence," and that "healthy commingling with fellow-creatures and a just appreciation of their pleasures was the only source of contentment for the young." "Remember," he had said in his last letter, "that you have your life to live, and that it lasts at most a few score years. Old age lives in the past. If you have no pleasant past to look back upon, your old age will be miserable indeed; and, after all, the making of one's pleasures and pains greatly rests with oneself. It is your duty to be as happy as you can, that your happiness may be imparted to others. Introspection is a subtle form of selfishness, and no selfishness can lead to happiness."

Why had he written like this? No letter of his own, he felt sure, had supplied the text for such a sermon. True; but the tone of them all for the past two years had led up to it. This Jim did not know.

It was all very well, he thought, and the truth of it was as clear as crystal; but, despite his efforts to take the old gentleman's advice and mould his conduct on these axioms, he failed. As he grew older—and he seemed to have grown ten years older in two—the more important the world as a social problem seemed to him, and the less he understood it. Things that he had once fancied beautiful had turned out to be commonplace, pleasures were but penances, and hopes highways to disappointment. But others did not preach these

doctrines; others saw gold where he saw only tinsel; others found no difficulties in their paths, and laughed at him when he mistook amusement for duty. The world was as bright as ever if he would but recognise the fact; it was his own horn-eyed stupidity that blinded him. The fault lay with himself. He was a weak, puling dreamer, without a grain of manly common sense about him. "Come, shake yourself," he said out loud; "be as others are; look your neighbour boldly in the face, you are as good as he. Assert yourself; you have never done anything to be ashamed of." He actually got up and shook himself, as if in this way he could shake off yesterday's frowns. He set his face into a smile and looked at it in a glass. It looked positively idiotic. "Oh, come," he said, "you're not quite so bad as that as a general rule, I hope; the expression doesn't become you; try another." He did, and it was worse than the first, so he gave up practising pleasantry and threw himself into his chair again. His eyes roamed round the room and he noticed all the pretty knickknacks; how tasteful it all was! but his expression did not change. He looked out of the open door into the night, and saw in the far distance Lucy Flight holding out her levely arms to him in the little drawing-room at Cabstand Square, and his eyes dilated with pleasure at the remembrance of those delightful times. "Oh, it's all changed now," he groaned, "and I have only myself to blame." He picked up the book she had been reading and glanced his eye over a few pages-love, passion, revenge, poetic jutsice. She had marked her place with a ball programme, and in sheer indolence he opened that. The initials "H.R." were very prominently

conspicuous, and the lines about his mouth and eyes deepened as he replaced the card and laid the book aside. His expression now, had he glanced again in the glass, would hardly have pleased him.

A low cry came wailing through the silence of the house, followed by the notes of a crooning lullaby, and all was still again. The lines on his face as he listened faded and died out one by one, a smile played about the corners of his mouth, a soft light kindled in his eyes, which he half closed as if experiencing some pleasant sensation. He sunk his head upon his hand and thought. The little cry had turned the whole current of his thoughts. How still the house was; how silent the night; what a lonely man he felt himself to be; and yet, no, not quite alone.

A hurrying footstep pattered in the verandah; a pair of shoes were shuffled off; his bearer handed him a telegram.

As he had said, if he were ordered to the front at all, it would be at a moment's notice. The Transport Service was a poor exchange for service on the personal staff of a distinguished general, but better than nothing. The opportunity he had longed for had come at last. The order lay in his hand. In four-and-twenty hours he would be gone.

He stole on tip-toe into his wife's room. The punkah waved noiselessly above her bed; she slept soundly; her beautiful hair streamed over the pillow, her lovely head rested on one rounded arm, the other hanging over the side of the bed, a model of perfect symmetry and unconscious grace. It was her left arm, and in the soft light of the room he could see the glimmer of her

wedding-ring. He knelt beside the listless hand and reverently kissed it. Who knows what was passing through his mind as he knelt there? Who knows but that a prayer breathed with all the fervour of faith rose to lips unaccustomed to prayer, and stole away through the dark night, silently ascending to the realms where prayers are heard, to be granted or left unanswered?

He sat up late arranging his papers and accounts, and setting his affairs in order. He put away his books—lesson books, as Lucy called them—upon a shelf, and wondered when they would be taken down again, and whether he would ever now pass his examination

At last he went to bed and slept, dreaming that he was returning from the war a Field Marshal, with a brilliant staff and a gay escort all shouting his praises. The people had all turned out to meet him, and among them he looked for Lucy, but for a long time in vain. At last he saw her standing aloof by herself. He rushed to meet her, but she turned and fled; he tried to follow, but tripped and fell heavily. He awoke to find his bearer pulling his big toe and telling him that the barber had come to shave him.

The day had begun—the last day of anxious inactivity and restless desire. Before it had closed he would be gone. He could scarcely believe it; Lucy could scarcely believe it; it was so very sudden and unexpected, she said; but how lucky he was to be chosen out of so many applicants!

It was a busy day, but amid all the hurry and bustle of preparation for her husband's departure, Lucy found time to scribble off a little note to Mr. Rook, saying

that though she might be late, she would certainly put in an appearance at his party that evening.

Jim meanwhile was making his final arrangements in the lines.

"I wish you luck," his Major said, shaking him warmly by the hand, "and we shall look forward to having you back with us again soon. You have learnt a great deal since I gave you that little piece of advice about expediency; but it's as good now as it was then. Remember expediency when you have forgotten everything else; and, by the way, it is not always expedient to tell one's wife everything one hears."

Jim understood this to mean that the worthy Major had quite forgiven him his unfortunate indiscretion, and trotted homewards happy on that account. On the way he met young Hicks, the happy possessor of many polo ponies and two racehorses.

"I say, Vraille," he shouted, "you're off to-night they tell me; is that so?"

Yes it was so.

"Look here, I'll give you my bay country-bred, Peter, and a thousand for Mustapha. You can't take a good horse up to that beastly country, where he'll have nothing to eat but thatch; if you do, you'll knock him to bits and lose a pot over him. Come, Peter and a thousand! Is it on? I can send him round at once—and the cheque," he added, persuasively.

"Much obliged for the offer," said Jim, "but Mustapha is not for sale;" and he trotted on.

"Not I, old boy," he said when he was out of earshot, leaning forward and patting his horse's neck; "you've carried me too often and too well. Never fear, I would not part with you for twice as much and twenty Peters into the bargain! Peter, indeed—the fiddle-headed camel! I'm not the rich man by half that I was when I bought you, but rich enough to keep you, any way."

He had balanced his accounts the night before, and found that, by settling up in all directions, he had just enough in the place for personal expenses without troubling his agents, which he was anxious not to do. But bills, when settling-up day really comes, seem to breed and multiply; a sheaf of them awaited settlement on his writing-table and made a large difference in his balance. They were mostly for things he had never seen or heard of, but supposed were necessary for household purposes of which he was ignorant, and he paid them cheerfully enough; he wished only to get to the end of his business and have leisure to talk to Lucy. When all at last seemed settled, his bearer told him that the Schroff was in the verandah and wished to see the Sahib.

The Schroff was admitted.

It was a small matter, only two thousand five hundred rupees lent at odd times to her Highness the Mem-Sahib—see the notes of hand. The Schroff was a poor man, and grieved to trouble his Highness, but perhaps the Sahib would see fit to settle for her Highness before he went forth to fight the Afghan: the land was full of disease and his Highness might not return; in which case.

Two thousand five hundred rupees! It was not the money—that was nothing in comparison—it was the want of confidence that for a moment made him hang his head before the cringing Schroff. If she had only

applied to him, how gladly would he have given her twice the amount rather than allow her to run into debt with such a man.

"Two thousand five hundred," he said, looking up; "oh, yes, I know all about that. Here's a cheque for five hundred and a 'chit' for a thousand. The other thousand I'll give you this evening if you'll call again, say in a couple of hours."

Mustapha was well known and required no veterinary certificate. A note was soon written, and the order soon given to take the horse round to Hicks Sahib's bungalow and bring back Peter. Jim had not time, he told himself, to go into the stable and pat his horse's neck; it was quite unnecessary to pat a horse's neck before selling him. He had done so that very morning when he had told him that they would go to the front together whatever happened; he could not go and tell him now that he was to be sold. The poor brute's eye would perhaps reproach him for breaking his word. No! he would watch him being led out of the compound instead.

"Why, Jim," cried Lucy, rushing into the room in a hurry, "there is Mustapha going off already; surely it's too soon."

"Mustapha is going for good, Lucy. I sold him—this morning." The hours were too precious to be wasted in useless explanation, so he said "this morning."

"Oh, I am sorry!" she exclaimed heartily; "he was such a beautiful horse!"

"Lucy," he said, approaching her and throwing his arm round her waist, "the Schroff says you owe him a

little money "—the colour left her cheek and her hand trembled—"I have paid him nearly all of it and have told him to come to me for the rest. Don't, Lucy dear, borrow money from natives; you have no idea of the amount of trouble it leads to. Come to me if you want anything."

"Yes," she said penitently; and he kissed her.

"And, while I am away, think of me as if I were here—here by your side as I am now. In spirit, Lucy, I shall always be with you, always thinking of you. There is nothing—nothing in the wide world I would not do for you if you will only trust me. Trust me as you would yourself; I am part of you; we are one, dear, however many miles may separate us."

He paused, and she fidgeted in her chair; he

frightened her.

"I am afraid, Lucy," he began again, "that sometimes we have not quite understood one another; I am afraid that I have not been gentle to you, as a man—still more a husband—should always be to the woman he loves."

"Oh, don't talk like that," she broke in, beginning to cry—he had touched her true self, he thought, and a gleam of joy shot through his heart to see her tears—"don't talk like that, I can't bear it; you have always been good to me, indeed you have."

"No, my darling, I have not; I have not tried to enter into your daily interests and amusements as I should. I feel now that we have not made the most of our lives—our lives together, I mean. But don't think harshly of me for that while I am away. Don't look back except to forgive; look forward to my coming.

I have been brusque and rude at times; I am impetuous and then morose; forgive these things, and only try to remember that I love you with my whole, whole heart!"

He held her hand, and, as if to seal a sort of solemn promise between them, raised it to his lips and kissed it. "Come," he said, "let us go and see our boy together."

Hand in hand they crossed the room. At the door he turned, and, flinging his arms round her, kissed her passionately, and whispered in her ear, "Remember, remember what we have been saying when I'm away."

In the nursery Jim went through his accustomed performance of face-making, and the baby crowed. After a time Lucy was called away to see to a parcel—a dress—that had just come home, and he and Judith discussed the child's health.

- "He's such a jolly little chap," said Jim.
- "Bless 'un, yes," said Judith.
- "And it would be an awful pity if he got ill again."
- "He won't get ill, Lord love 'un!"
- "You'll see to that?"
- "To be sure I will, sir!" said Judith, vehemently.
- "You'll look after him, and never let him out of your sight, except, of course, when he is with his mother?"
 - "Make your mind quite easy there, sir."
- "And, Judith, you'll not think of leaving us till I get back?" He tried his utmost to put the question unconcernedly, and even followed it up with a whistle for the baby's edification; but his voice trembled a little, and the whistle broke in the middle.

"I'll not leave you, sir—ever," she replied; "least-ways till I'm told."

He sighed a sigh which seemed to be of relief, and in his usual brusque way thrust the child into her arms and strode out of the room.

Dinner that night was a silent, melancholy meal, and after dinner there was but little time for conversation.

The last trunk had been packed, the last order given, the last suggestion made; the tikka-gharri was at the door, the last package had been put into it—the time of departure had come. The sky, which had been clear throughout the day, had clouded over and the rain was pouring down in torrents; it was a miserable night. There was no excuse and no time for further delay. He must go.

A man on his way to the wars may march through crowded streets, with bands playing and colours flying, with the mob cheering, and handkerchiefs fluttering from balconies—a look of exultation on his face, pride and hope in his heart. A man may leave for the wars from the platform of a garrison railwaystation, the sad strains of Auld Lang Syne ringing in his ears, and the last kiss of his wife lingering upon his lips for many an hour after he has lost sight of her waving hand; a man may stand at a ship's side and watch England, Home, and all that is dear to him fading away into the distance. There are various ways of leaving for the wars, all more or less heroic. But to pass from the genial light of home into the pouring rain outside, and step into a common tikka-gharri, is more prosaic than heroic. Lucy was crying a little; and in his last embrace, while

bidding her be brave, he held her to his heart as if he would never again release his hold. "I'll soon, soon be back, my darling, but don't let the little chap forget me!" Then with a wrench he tore himself free.

"The station!" she heard him shout defiantly; and the sound of the crunching wheels was soon lost in the distance.

"Put out the dress that came home for me to-day," was the order Judith received a little later.

"What! going out-to-night?"

"Yes, yes; it's a bore, but I must go, I suppose."

CHAPTER VIII.

WORK.

In point of distance, Vraille's journey was a long one, in point of time much longer. For six-and-thirty hours the train whirled him westward, but then all rapidity and even certainty of movement ceased, and he experienced difficulties and delays innumerable.

He journeyed in jerks; now crawling at a snail's pace on a high road behind a pair of jaded animals called by courtesy horses, stopping at every rut in which a wheel could stick; now flying at break-neck speed along a broken track in a tonga mail-cart drawn by three hill ponies abreast, whose only paces were a shambling walk and a riotous gallop. An eighteen hours' journey in one of these tongas was a gymnastic exercise that gave him an ache in every bone of his body. Still, anything was better than delay; and it was exasperating to be detained for days at a time waiting his turn for a place in one or other of these vehicles, and then, at the last moment, to see it given to some one else whose business was more urgent than his own. On that busy road, where all were struggling for the same goal, he was but an unimportant individual, armed with no "pressing" or "special" orders, and his progress was proportionately slow.

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But, like every one else, he got on somehow, shedding portmanteaux as he went, and consigning to Parsee care every vestige of surplus stock in hand. At last, after experiencing many of the minor fortunes and misfortunes of war, he reached the mysterious line of demarcation between British territory and foreign soil—the Frontier! Here the exigencies of the service required that he should remain. Thus far, and, for the present at any rate, no farther were the orders he received; and so, within actual sight of the promised land, he halted and, literally enough, pitched his tent.

The invisible though far from imaginary line which just then meant so much to military mankind, stretched across the arid country at his very feet; on the far side lay ambition, on the near side disappointment; on both work and heat in plenty. Here peace was supposed to end and war to begin, and just short of the distinctive limit Vraille soon found himself very hard at work.

From morning until night he worked. Idleness in such a place was impossible, quiet unknown, and a night's rest a luxury. Order was here thrown daily into confusion, and confusion reduced to order. It was incessant and almost overwhelming work, but he laboured on and hoped. Day after day the living stream from India poured through the rocky pass, but he was left behind as in a swirling eddy. Week after week thousands of marching feet crossed the threshold of hostility, while his seemed destined never to advance a step. He saw drafts formed into columns, and stores into convoys; he watched them depart one by one, and sent a sigh after each. For no glory attended all this

work—it was but the preparation for glory, and, although he performed his duties with a zeal and earnestness that invested all his labours with a sort of melancholy merit, his soul panted for movement—movement that would carry him beyond the limits of mere active duty into the confines of active service. Such is war! The humblest and least ambitious of us likes to feel that his labour means reward; and where medals, clasps, and batta are at stake, the invisible line that separates them from duty for duty's sake is a distinctive boundary that it is well to cross and leave as far behind as possible.

Vraille was no high-souled hero who despised the little tokens of success; on the contrary, he wanted them, and had come over a thousand miles to get them. No one seemed to take any notice of him, and so, losing patience at last, he laid his case before those in authority over him, and said he wished to get on. Any application he liked to put in, he was told, would be forwarded through the proper channel. And here a slight surprise was in store for him: the proper channel for those beyond the frontier serving in his capacity was Colonel Dare. Now Jim knew well enough that Colonel Dare was employed on the same service as himself, and in the same part of the country, but he had supposed that his old friend had long before pushed himself well to the front, and had thought it exceedingly unlikely they would ever meet. And, if they did meet, what then? It mattered little. The old grievance was now very old indeed, and the old sore had well-nigh healed. Still Jim felt that the Colonel was hardly the person he would have WORK. 139

chosen to apply to for any sort of favour, however indirectly; and under the circumstances he preferred to wait and see what fortune or luck had in store for him. Fortune had favoured him so far; he was on the very brink of his desire, and it only needed a touch of luck to send him over.

"I've got a pretty good grip on to my new work by now," he wrote to Lucy, "and as time goes on the strain of course decreases. Already a stream has begun to flow in the opposite direction; the sick are coming in every day, and the wounded, too, which shows that things are going briskly at the front—the real front, I mean. I am not likely to see much fighting myself, nor am I likely to fall ill, for the healthy season will soon be setting in. You need not be in the very least anxious about me."

Poor Jim! Anxious about him! Ah, well, many a better man than he never got near the front at all, and few had such a lovely wife to write to and conceal things from!

The healthy season, as he so cheerfully called it, was certainly approaching, but meanwhile disease was accelerating promotion and opening vacancies in all directions. His turn was bound to come, and it came at last. But it was not until the rigours of the Punjaub winter had fairly set in that he heard he was to move onward. With delight he read his orders, with alacrity he prepared to obey them, and with enthusiasm he wrote the good news to Lucy; but it was with a feeling of inward misgiving that he looked forward to serving under the command of Colonel Dare.

By short, but not easy stages, he proceeded on his

way, and soon got accustomed to a life of perpetual discomfort. What mattered discomfort to a man released from a Pandemonium of inglorious labour! He laughed to see the skin peeling off his face and his beard sprouting in unsightly tufts, and wondered what his wife would think of him if she could only see him: ah, how he wished he could see her every now and again! He had pined for movement, and now every day in the saddle was taking him nearer and nearer to the front. The three months' delay on the frontier had ruined all his hopes of serving in the first advance; but the war-although a number of engagements had been fought-was very far from over, and there was plenty of time and scope for action yet. From camp to fort, from fort to serai, his duties carried him. On the march, in camp, surprise was always to be anticipated. Weak parties on the road, small garrisons in the halting-places, were common objects of attack, not so much from purely hostile motives as for purposes of plunder; but even the wanton murder of defenceless men struck him with less horror than the sight of sane men going mad from over-anxiety and too much sun, as he had seen them do in the wretched place that, thank Heaven, he had now left far behind.

Spring was at hand, and the hearts of those that waited rejoiced. The snows upon the mountains were melting, the passes would soon be open, and hopes were high. Movements took place in the various columns, fresh dispositions were being made, and the road again became the scene of lively activity. Vraille watched the living panorama as it streamed along, and caught himself wondering whether everything in life worth

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having (the mail had brought him no letter for some time) was destined to pass by him, while he stood helplessly on one side and watched. Around him stretched the dreary waste of sand and stone. Before him lay the road, laden with rotting carcases that filled the air with stench. Along it passed the heterogeneous crowd—long strings of stately camels and herds of refractory bullocks, sowars and sepoys, growling ammunition waggons and creaking carts, Pathans, Sikhs, Half-castes, Baboos, Europeans. Here were all the elements of war, but where its sheen and glitter? The sun glared down upon the dusty scene throughout the day, then suddenly sank below the horizon, leaving the chills of evening to complete the process that produced fever wholesale.

But fortune, who had stood his friend so often, smiled upon him once again. News reached him that an officer at the Head-quarter Camp, as it was called, had been invalided, and he knew that in the ordinary course of events the vacant billet would soon be placed at his disposal. Was this luck, or was it not? Could he decline the post if it were offered him? Hardly. Time set his doubts at rest by bringing him "orders" to report himself forthwith to Colonel Dare. For six months in all he had been a wanderer on the road; for three of them he had suffered hardship and discomfort. discomforts, he knew, would soon be at an end; but should he lose his liberty of action with them? The success or failure of his next move remained to be proved. Once again he struck his tent; once again he saddled Peter for the march.

The last stage was reached in time, and, on the

afternoon of a too glorious day, after a longer march than usual, Vraille saw in the distance the outlines of an Afghan fort, and dotted about on the surrounding plain a cluster of white specks sparkling in the sun's declining rays. Larger and larger grew the specks until they assumed the well-known proportions of the many-shaped tents of a large camp. Directed to the Head-quarter Mess, Jim sent in his name to Colonel Dare.

"Well, Vraille," said the pompous voice he remembered so well, "here you are at last; you've been taking your time, haven't you? But never mind that now; we can hear all about it to-morrow. You'll find a room in the fort to shake down in for the night, I dare say. Come to my office the first thing in the morning, and I'll set you to work."

"Very good, sir," said Jim; and away he went, reminded by the savoury odours that pervaded the Head-quarter Mess how desperately hungry he was, and wondering whether he would be able to get anything to eat and drink at the fort.

As he stood staring somewhat helplessly about him at its mud walls, he was accosted by a lackadaisical-looking young gentleman who was leaning out of an open window smoking a cigarette. "Looking for the mess?" he said; "here it is, come in and have a drink."

When Jim had explained his position and requirements, the lackadaisical young gentleman, who introduced himself as Dr. Doyle, supplied him in a trice with bread, butter, cold chicken, biscuits, cheese, proof rum, and other delicacies. "Half a dozen of us," he said, "attached to no particular regiment, have a scratch

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mess of our own in here, and if you are going to be under old Dare you'd better join us."

In spite of his languid manner and drawling speech, Dr. Doyle—better known, Jim soon found out, as Dr. Dick—had not only a number of valuable suggestions to make for the new-comer's comfort, but did not mind exerting himself to put them into effect. He speedily arranged for a room in which Jim could pass the night, superintended the picketing of Peter, and offered the loan of everything he possessed. That night a pair of really clean blankets, a soft pillow, and a hospital dhoolie, formed the most comfortable bed that Jim had slept in for many a long day. "Well," he said to himself as he slipped into it, "the scratch mess may not be so important as the Head-quarter Mess, but it is a deuced sight more hospitable, any way."

In the morning he presented himself at the Colonel's office soon after daybreak, but was told by a fat baboo that the Colonel Sahib never put in an appearance until nine o'clock at earliest. So Jim employed the spare time in collecting his scattered baggage, pitching his tent, and seeing to Peter's creature comforts.

When the Colonel at last arrived, he was brimful of dignity and importance. The service on which they were engaged, he said, was of greater consequence than any in the field; for what was an army without mobility? What, thought Jim, would an army be without food, without help for the sick and wounded, without stores, without an experienced staff? However, knowing that all the world over "there is nothing like leather," and that esprit-de-corps was a noble sentiment, he did not argue the point.

"Of course," said Colonel Dare, "you are aware that I am the official representative of this particular service, and that a great number of officers besides yourself are accountable to me for the efficient performance of their duties; but, as for the present you are to work directly under me, I had better tell you personally how I wish things done, that we may understand one another. It is unfortunate that your predecessor was obliged to leave without formally handing over charge; but I will explain all that is necessary myself. You will open the letters and prepare answers (unless my special consideration is required) for my signature, and have everything ready for me when I come down in the morning. The lines and forage will be under your sole charge, the books and official documents will require your special attention, the payment of natives——" And so the Colonel went grandly on, detailing matters that had been at Vraille's fingers' ends for months past, and evincing a perfect knowledge of the duties incumbent on other people. The recital occupied some considerable time; and, as Jim said, "Yes, sir," and "Very good, sir," at intervals, he thought to himself that his new billet was not likely to prove a sinecure.

"You must understand," concluded the Colonel,

"You must understand," concluded the Colonel, "that administrative and executive details are your province, responsibility and general supervision mine. I am always to be found in the staff lines or at the Head-quarter Mess, in the event of any emergency.

—Pretty comfortable now?" he asked, lighting a cigar. "That's right; soon settle on service—eh? I'll be down the same time to-morrow. Good morning;"

and away strode the gallant little chief, just as florid, though not quite so stout, as Jim had known him in England, but every whit as consequential as he had ever been.

True to his promise, Colonel Dare visited the office every day, and was never more than half an hour late. His ideas of general supervision were very general indeed. "They want a report upon so-and-so," he would say, or, "The Government has called for such and such a return," or, "Here is an urgent heliogram: I have left blanks for the figures, kindly fill them in and send on." Vraille wrote the report, compiled the return, constructed the heliogram, and took all the trouble; the Colonel affixed his signature and took all the credit. Still, Jim gained secret pleasure out of his work, and secret pride in the thought that he was fast becoming master of the situation. But while active service meant for him office-work, occasional inspection tours, and constant gallopings on Peter to and from the lines, the really active part of the army was advancing on before, like a will-o'-the-wisp that he would never catch. Battles were fought, marches made, forts taken, passes scaled, while on the lines of communication all was comparatively inactive and secure. Security and inaction led to the desire for amusement in default of anything better, and there was plenty going forward in the place-polo, gymkhanas, races, sports, concerts, cricket. Where, and under what circumstances, when two or three Englishmen are gathered together, is there not sport of some kind? And where—in the Desert of Sahara. on the Steppes of Siberia—would they not play cricket?

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Vraille had little leisure, and perhaps not much inclination, to take any great part in these amusements, but he thoroughly enjoyed the good-fellowship of the Bohemian mess to which he belonged.

"Come down and have a look at the cricket," said Dr. Dick to him one afternoon; "there won't be much more of it now from what the thermometer says, and an outing would do you good."

"I've got some work I ought to do," said Jim, hesitatingly; "but perhaps I could let it stand over until to-morrow."

"To-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow! of course it will stand over; take it with the rest that that old fool will pile upon you to-morrow. You'll never reach to-morrow, and you'll never reach the end of your work if you try to get through all old Dare tells you to do—every one but you knows that."

"Oh, I know it too!" laughed Jim, sighing all the same. "Well, all right, Dick, I'll go with you."

Richard Doyle, the youthful-looking doctor, and James Vraille, the old-looking captain, were a strangely-assorted pair. To all appearances there was nothing in common between them; but friendship, no less than love, is guided by no fixed law, unless it be the law of contraries, and is often cemented by seeming incongruities. Dr. Dick was distinguished for the symmetry of his figure, the elegance of his hand and feet, the beau ty of his eyes and complexion, and the cleanliness of his attire under all circumstances. For some unknown reason (perhaps that his eyes reminded him of Lucy's—who knows?) Vraille had formed one of those strong attachments to which

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he was addicted, and spent the greater part of his spare time in the company of this refined young gentleman. They discussed all sorts of questions together, and in these discussions the younger man listened with phlegmatic interest to the enthusiasm of the elder. What one saw to admire in the other no one could understand; but perhaps it was a pleasure to Vraille to open his mind unrestrainedly to an appreciative listener; and perhaps Dr. Dick had quicker perceptive faculties than most people, and recognised qualities in his white-haired companion which were hidden from the outside world. Be that as it may, some subtle sympathy existed between the two, and its influence tended to attract the elder to the younger man. It was in Doyle's tent that Vraille was more often to be found than Dovle in Vraille's, in the sultry evenings when the day's work was done

"Why work like this?" said Dr. Dick on one of these occasions when Jim came in and flung himself wearily into a chair. "Why not let him do his own dirty work?"

"He's an old friend of mine," Jim replied, somewhat bitterly for him; "and, besides, he has plenty to do imparting instruction and giving gratis advice to every one he meets, without bothering his head about bullocks."

"He'll wear you to a thread," pursued the other, "as he did the unfortunate devil you succeeded, and never chuck you a thank, but take all the credit of your brains and work to himself."

Jim knew that this was true. He had worked, and

worked hard—there was not a camel in the place he could not account for; he had never received a word of thanks; and he only found that an intimate knowledge of his business brought pains as well as pleasures with it. It was pleasant to be sent for by persons in authority, and consulted when the Colonel's memory was at fault, but it was not altogether pleasant to find the whole work of the office gradually devolving on himself; it was, no doubt, gratifying to see his own opinions and ideas figuring in important correspondence, but hardly so gratifying to stand by and hear his chief referring to my letter, my remarks, my report, when not a word of any one of them had been written by himself except the signature at the bottom.

"And yet he talks incessantly of his responsibility,"
Jim said moodily, more in answer to his thoughts than
his companion's last remark; "and, after all, he's only
playing the same game that every one plays more or

less; but unfortunately he shows his hand."

"If I took that melancholy view of mankind," drawled Dr. Dick, "I'd go and shoot myself."

"So would I," said Jim, stretching his long legs and running his fingers through the grizzly stubble that he used to call his hair when it had been long enough to part; "so would I. I'm talking rot as usual. It's no fault of his if he don't like me and my ways—he never did."

"Nor yours if you don't like him and his. He's an ass. But have you served under him before?"

"Yes, once—a long time ago now."

"At home, I suppose?"

"Yes, at home."

As Vraille seemed disinclined to volunteer any further information on this point, Dr. Dick, after a pause, continued—

"A garrison is a very different thing to a camp. Camp life is more like school life—it's a great leveller of persons. Authority and discipline are maintained in both, but in both cant, selfishness, humbug, sentiment, are pretty sure to be roughly handled and knocked about—"

"Until they fall into their proper places," continued Jim.

"Just so; and I believe the reason is that there are no petticoats to hide behind in camp."

Jim winced.

"Sooner or later the man living under canvas, like the boy at school, is sure to come out in his true colours and show himself as he is. Look at you for example. I'll bet that when you served under old Dare at home, no one imagined you would turn out to be the most patient military machine that ever walked in a pair of puttoo pantaloons."

"'Pon my soul, you're complimentary!" laughed Jim, thinking that Dick had driven a nail home.

"Take another example—old Dare. Now I expect he was a mighty big man in a garrison."

"Took up the whole hearth-rug," said Jim.

"Is the respect he commands in this camp proportionate to the dignity of his rank, do you suppose? or, better still, to his own conception of the importance of his position? Who, should you think now, was more often than not the subject of a good deal of the laughter that we hear at the Head-quarter Mess about dinner

time? Bless your simplicity, they've found him out up there, and written him down an ass long ago."

"Well, running the man down behind his back is not particularly fair, but I do wish he would look into things a little more. I'm not satisfied in my mind, do you know, Dick, that all is straight in that office, and I don't want to see him get into trouble, whether I like him or whether I don't."

"Why, what's the matter?"

"Nothing that I know of—that's the worst of it," said Jim, thoughtfully.

"Are you bothered, old chap? Can I help you?" There was sympathy and softness in his voice—there was even tenderness in the light of his honest blue eyes as he looked at Jim. Ah, how like they were to Lucy's, and yet how different!

"No, Dick, no-thanks-but it doesn't matter!"

"Don't worry about him; he's not worth it. Let him sweat it out, whatever it is, for himself; it will do him good. Let him rip. Take my advice and exercise your energy in your own interests. Bah, you'll never get on; you're far too earnest. As for old Dare, he has go enough of his own, surely, to carry him through anything."

"I wish it would carry him out of this," laughed Jim-

"O-ho!" shouted Dr. Dick, whose humours were as changeable as sunshine in spring, and as prettily playful too—"o-ho! here's jovial James cracking jokes—and at his commanding officer's expense. Come along; let's take 'em up to the Head-quarter Mess, they'll be appreciated there."

It was proverbial that old Dare had a bad time of it among his peers—such secrets will leak out—but chaff

did his temper little good. The louder the laughter overnight, the worse time Jim had of it in the morning. At such times the little gentleman was portentously busy. Business with him meant fuss, and fuss meant heat, dust, and general unpleasantness all round, not to mention much valuable time wasted. He inquired into this, searched into that, scattering books and papers in all directions; asked for obsolete orders and quoted old regulations, dotted down instructions on slips of paper, counter-ordering them as he went along, and contradicting himself continually.

This sort of thing generally put him in a good temper, for after a time he would stop to talk about "a good day's work," "going thoroughly into things myself," and "waking you all up." But one morning, a day or two after Jim's talk with Dr. Dick, when the Colonel had thrown the office into greater confusion than usual, and was still unsatisfied with his day's work, he suddenly recollected an error in his accounts to which Vraille had called his attention the day before. Having cleared the office, he put on a confidential air, dipped his pen into the ink (for no manifest reason), and lowering his voice, said—

- "And now, how about that mistake?"
- "I have corrected it," said Vraille.
- "Who made it?"

Jim named a half-caste clerk.

- "Tell him, will you, that mistakes of this sort must not occur again? I won't have mistakes made."
- "You recollect," said Jim, "that I have pointed out three or four of the same sort before."
 - "I know, I know," said the Colonel, testily. "Why

can't you manage to make things work smoothly? These little hitches give a great deal of trouble, and you must see for the future that they are avoided."

"But suppose," said Jim, looking the Colonel full in

the face, "that they are made on purpose?"

"Made on purpose! What do you mean?"

"That from what I have heard and seen I believe that man is not honest."

"Not honest!" cried the Colonel; "why, he has been in this office ever since I've been here myself, and I never heard a word against him before; you must be very careful about what you are saying."

"I intend to be," said Jim, grimly; "at present I

have confined myself to beliefs."

"But it is your business, sir," retorted the Colonel, warmly, "to report everything to me—everything, remember; I hold you responsible."

"Pardon me, Colonel, you told me when I came here

that you took the responsibility."

"In a general sense, certainly; but in matters of detail of this sort——"

"All details, so far as I am concerned, are perfectly correct."

"And when you took over charge--"

"If you remember," Jim interrupted again, "I did not take over charge."

"But I myself told you-"

"What my duties were."

"Am I to be dictated to in my own office?" cried the Colonel, jumping up and looking angrily at his junior; "am I to be browbeaten and taught my duty by my subordinates?"

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Vraille only smiled. His composure seemed to irritate the little man beyond all sense of dignity. "I will not be answered in this way, sir," he said, stuttering in his wrath; "I will not brook contradiction, let me tell you; and I'd have you remember the respect you owe me as your superior officer."

Vraille's lip just curled slightly, but he said nothing. Perhaps his old major's advice about "expediency"

was standing him in good stead just then.

"You seem to insinuate that the work here before you came was not properly carried out?"

"I insinuate nothing," Vraille replied, rather hotly now; "I know nothing of what was done before I came. I thought it my duty to tell you what I have told you, and I believe what I say."

"Prove it," exclaimed the Colonel, "prove it! Don't come to me with ridiculous fancies, but bring proofs if you want me to listen to you."

"Very good, sir," said Jim, calmly; "I'll try."

Now Vraille's thorough knowledge of Hindustani had enabled him to understand a great deal of the tittle-tattle that he overheard daily among his natives. He gleaned from what they said that they were dissatisfied about some arrears of pay which many of them had been induced to leave in the office to accumulate instead of receiving when due. Again, that many beasts supposed to have been stolen were in reality given away as bribes or sold outright. These things, together with repeated errors in addition and subtraction, besides the graver mistakes which he had brought to the Colonel's notice, led him to suspect the honesty of the half-caste clerk.

After his stormy interview with Colonel Dare, he determined to put his suspicions to the test. Accordingly, that afternoon, he went down to the lines among the natives, and boldly put to them, without mentioning any names, a string of questions. The men seemed only too anxious to unburden their minds to any Sahib who would take an interest in their affairs; and Jim learnt many strange things, all of which he carefully jotted down in a note-book. That night, after mess, he went over to his office, and for a couple of hours studied the ledgers and account books of his predecessor, continually referring to his note-book, and taking careful memoranda of his discoveries. What they were he told no one—not even Dr. Dick.

Every day the Colonel asked him for his proofs; every day Jim answered that he was not ready with them; every evening he prosecuted his inquiries.

At last, when more than a week had been spent in this unpleasant way, the Colonel declared that he had stood the private detective condition of things long enough, and had demanded an audit of the accounts as a satisfaction to himself.

"Then, in Heaven's name," Jim blurted out, "arrest that clerk at once on suspicion, or you're done!"

"What—what do you mean?" Until then Jim had always thought it impossible for the Colonel's face ever to be pale.

"I mean that, as far as I've gone, that gentleman in there, whom you trust so much, has let you in for between two and three thousand rupees."

"Good God!" exclaimed the poor Colonel; "I

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haven't as much in the world—no, I don't mean that
—I mean it's a lie, and I don't believe a word you
say."

"Look here, sir," said Jim, drawing up his gaunt figure to its full height, "you're a bit put out, I know, and I can make excuses for you, but I won't be spoken to like that by any one. You will be good enough to withdraw that last remark of yours, or I must leave you to fight your own battles, and ask the General to decide whether I have lied or not!"

"No, no, Vraille, my dear fellow, of course I apologise; I spoke in haste—and no wonder; I did not mean that you were guilty of an untruth—of course not. But just explain the state of affairs to me, will you? Quietly, you know, quite quietly!"

The poor little Colonel was literally trembling with apprehension. Vraille produced his notes and memoranda, and at the end of half an hour had convinced his chief that what he had said was no less than the truth.

"Whatever shall we do?" asked the Colonel, looking up piteously at Vraille, his dignity fast deserting him.

Disregarding the we of this remark, the implication of which he seemed strongly tempted to question, Jim answered simply, "That, sir, is for you to decide."

"I'll telegraph to that man—what was his name? dear me, I forget for the moment—that man, I mean, who was here before you."

"He's dead, for one thing," said Vraille; "and secondly, so far as I can see, he has nothing whatever to do with it. Any falsified accounts I've come across are all certified as correct by your signature, not his."

"Dear, dear!" said the poor little man helplessly, "whatever shall I do?"

"Why, make a clean breast of it—arrest the man who made the entries, and report the case at once."

"But I have already demanded an audit; and, Vraille, to be candid, I said it was because I did not believe your statements."

"You did that!" exclaimed Jim. He made no attempt to conceal his disgust and annoyance, but checked the words of contempt that rose to his lips.

"You see I can't possibly tell the General yet. I do not even know the extent of my liabilities."

"Well, of course you must do as you like, but I believe you are making a mistake. Come! let me go and clap the rascal in the guard-room."

"Don't address me in that familiar fashion, Captain Vraille, although we are discussing confidential matters," said the Colonel, regaining some of his dignity. "I will give you my decision in the morning. In the meantime please make every investigation and endeavour to ascertain the sum-total of these defalcations."

In this way some men give thoughtless orders; and others are found foolish enough to obey them. To Vraille an order was an order, and he sat up far into the night poring over his books. It was close on daybreak when he laid them aside and went to bed.

"Well," asked the Colonel, turning up at officehour fresh as a daisy, "what have you to report?"

"A deficit of four thousand five hundred," said Jim. Colonel Dare gasped, and as he sank into his chair

Colonel Dare gasped, and as he sank into his chair clutched the arms of it tightly. "Arrest him!" he said at last.

"When I can catch him, I will—he's bolted."

For the second time in their lives these two men confronted one another under trying circumstances. The tables were completely turned; and though Vraille had made no accusation, the Colonel now looked every inch of him the culprit. There was a silence of some seconds, and then in a broken voice he muttered, "I'm a ruined man."

"Not a bit of it, sir!" said Jim, encouragingly. "Pay the men up, and take the rest of the money with your report to the General. No one can say a word to you then. We are all liable to make mistakes."

True as all this was, it failed to raise the Colonel's spirits. "I said I was sure that everything was right," he faltered.

- "Well, now you must say you were mistaken, that's all."
 - "Can you put the books right?"
 - "Oh, yes!" said Jim, cheerily.
- "And we need not mention those men if we pay them up?"
 - "You need not, of course."
- "Then it's only a matter of money—four thousand five hundred, you said? If I only had it, I could pull this wretched business through. But I haven't; I could not, if I did my utmost, manage more than three thousand—you said three thousand yesterday. I am a poor man, although I am a colonel. I say, Vraille, you couldn't, I suppose—you couldn't——' and there he stopped.

Jim faltered, and then, after a momentary inward

struggle, replied carelessly, "If you don't mind being my debtor for a time, Colonel, I shan't want my pay for a couple of months; I've plenty to go on with."

"Thank you, thank you!" said the Colonel, pulling himself together; "very generous of you to be sure; but we will make it a pure matter of business. I will give you security, of course, and interest, if you wish it."

But Vraille did not wish it.

"You will oblige me," the Colonel remarked, as he dried a cheque on his blotting-pad, "by not mentioning this little transaction to any one—will you?"

"You need not have asked me that," said Jim sitting down to draw up the Colonel's report.

What the result of that report was Vraille never knew. Three days afterwards news reached the camp that the body of a half-caste had been found on the road, murdered, and of course looted. The audit of the transport accounts passed off successfully, and a rumour spread that the money stolen by the runaway clerk had been generously made good by Colonel Dare.

Murders and robberies on the road were common enough, and the affair was soon forgotten. Dr. Dick at first plied Jim with questions; but finding that he would not answer them, confined himself to chaffing his friend occasionally about his reticence.

"No one but I seemed to think it strange," he said one day, "that a man should risk his life for a few hundred rupees; but every one was astonished that old Dare should have been clever enough to find out he was being swindled. Only the other day I heard him saying how lucky it was he discovered the rascal's tricks before much damage was done. He did not mention your name at all. Now that was not kind of him, was it?"

"He is not exactly what one would call a kind man," laughed Jim; "but let's talk of something else."

"In a minute; but I just want to say that when a man like you is loyal to a man like Dare; when he refuses a friend's assistance because he has that man's secret to keep; when he goes out evening after evening and works half the night; and when he holds his tongue while every one else is talking, I strongly suspect him of having somehow saved that man's reputation; and a reputation is not lost for a few hundred rupees."

"He was perfectly straight," said Jim, hastily; "indeed he was!"

"You were straighter, or he'd have said something about you!" said Dr. Dick.

CHAPTER IX.

ACTION.

Then came the heat—heat that filled the hospitals and sent men by hundreds back to India—heat that pierced through canvas as if it were tissue-paper—heat that increased with each succeeding week, until there was no appreciable difference of temperature between day and night, and the mercury hovered about the hundreds in the sun; there was no shade worthy of the name.

Now and then a skirmish, a raid, a murder in the dead of night, a road-side robbery, varied the long-drawn-out monotony; but, for the most part, life in those rainless plains was but a wearisome succession of tedious days, all blazing hot, all bringing with them disease and death in some shape or form.

Vraille had often changed his station, but always gravitated back to the Head-quarter Camp after an absence of a few weeks; perhaps the Colonel had learnt his value. A visit of inspection to a serai a couple of stages up the line was now over, and Jim and his chief were to return to the camp on the morrow.

He was writing to Lucy. "We hear of great things done," he said, "but we do not see them. Great things are not for me; I am, I fear, a man doomed to inactivity." (He did not add that inactivity was killing

more men than all the battles of the war—and the war, every one said, was practically over). "You should have married a luckier fellow, Lucy-one who now and then got a chance of doing, instead of one always talking of wishing to do. You remember, darling, years ago now, how I longed for a chance of distinction, in order, as I said, to wipe out the stain of a certain event which I need not name again. I have had my wish; it has been granted in the cynical way in which Fortune has always bestowed her favours on me. What is Fortune without Luck? For nearly half a year now I have been serving under the very man who first put that absurd ambition in my head, and who is now fast driving it all out again: indeed, it is dying, it not dead, of contradiction." Here, again, he made no allusion to Colonel Dare's official troubles. A woman could barely be expected to take interest in such things: and Lucy, he fancied, did not always (judging from her replies) read his letters through. So he was careful to refrain from digressions which he thought might weary her, and tried to confine himself as much as possible to facts. Sometimes he even attempted the flippant, amusing style; but such passages, when he read them over to himself, never seemed to him particularly funny. "That moonshee," he said in one of these attempts. "was a smart fellow in his way, although you never liked him. He always told me I had more Hindustani to unlearn than to learn, and that my knowledge of the language was derived from the riff-raff of the bazaar rather than from the classics of the country. I can write it, speak it, understand it—all vulgarly it seems. They were hard up for an interpreter for a court-martial

the other day. I volunteered my services. Had I passed the necessary examination? No. So I attended the court in the character of private member, and interpreted for the interpreter, who was a Higher Standard man, and had been brought twenty miles to officiate. He got his fee, I his thanks." He had posted this anecdote long since, wondering what she would say about it. She had taken a short cut out of the difficulty and had said nothing.

Anxiously he looked for her letters: hurriedly he broke them open when they came: eagerly he read them through: and very often with an ungenerous feeling of keen disappointment he laid them down when read. Lucy was not a good correspondent; her letters were often ill expressed and sometimes misspelt. But that was nothing. It was that they were so short, so barren of home topics—and latterly so very few and far between.

For more than six weeks she had not written. He took her last letter from his writing-case to assure himself of the date. It bore no date but that of the postmark on the envelope.—Yes; nearly seven weeks old. He glanced his eye over the letter, although he knew every word of it by heart:—"Time flies in this place, letter-writing is a positive difficulty.... You have no idea how I am enjoying myself.... You remember that dress that you said you did not like so much as my others; well, I had one made exactly like it and wore it the other night. It was greatly admired. The Viceroy admired it. The Viceroy danced with me twice.... Mrs. Lovejoy and Mrs. Palmira were both there.... we did not get home till three in the morning.... you never appreciated me properly, Jim, I know, but other people...."

He put the letter back into its envelope with a sigh, and sitting down at his table wrote:—

"Send me just a word, Lucy—just a line every week to say you and the boy are well. Do not let six weeks pass again without my hearing from you. I am anxious. Are you ill, and is that the reason?...." His pen flew over the paper—scratch, scratch, scratch. He who writes from the heart writes quickly, and Jim wrote on and on from his very heart of hearts. He was home-sick, he said, and yearning for a sight of his wife and child. Sometimes at night he could see her face, and hear her voice, imploring him to come back to her. Was this all foolish fancy? Or could it be that some spiritual communion was granted to two souls far apart, so that in some mysterious way they were in reality but one? Could it be that hearts which had once learnt to beat in unison could never beat apart again, and that only discord made them ache? "I dare not say that I believe these things," he wrote; "but often have I thought and hoped that there might be some great undiscovered law (shall I say) governing our spirits, as the laws of nature govern our coarser selves. We are too ignorant to know, too material to perceive its influences; but every now and then there comes a flash of sudden light to our dull faculties, and we think we see for a moment the glimmering of some universal but unknown truth."

He dashed down these high-flown sentiments as they passed through his mind, and then caught himself wondering whether she would read them with a yawn. He put the thought away at once as unworthy, but descended all the same to humbler topics.

"Do not forget, Lucy dear, that you see the boy every day and all day, and so are apt to think the less of the changes that are taking place in him. Put yourself in my place, who have not seen him for nearly a year, and try to realise how you would wish to hear every detail. Fill pages with detail—you will not bore me. Can he walk yet? Can he talk? Do you ever tell him about me? You hardly ever mention him, and "

A shadow fell across the paper, and looking up, he saw the well-known figure of Colonel Dare.

"Writing home? That's right. Plenty to tell them this time, eh?"

"Nothing unusual," stammered Jim, feeling rather

guilty.

- "Why, haven't you heard the news, then? You're quite behind the times. I have just been discussing it with the political officer here, and we agree in thinking it the most important event of the campaign. Why, my dear Vraille, an expedition has been attacked and cut to pieces. Ayoob is master of the field, and it is rumoured that this defeat has had a very serious effect upon the country—generally unsettled, you see, and that sort of thing. But, dear me, I am surprised at your not having heard all this; it has been the talk of the place for the past two hours. I came to tell you, though, about to-morrow's journey. This news has decided me to push right through instead of stopping as I had arranged at H—— for the night."
 - "It's a good sixteen miles," said Vraille.
- "We can do it morning and evening. You see, it is of the greatest importance that I should push on—the

General might wish to consult me in the matter. Make the necessary arrangements for escorts, and see that we start early." Then the Colonel expatiated on his news, and explained to Vraille how the calamity might have been avoided. When he had finished, Jim said:

"A small convoy is to leave H—— for the camp to-morrow; I had better signal down to have it kept till the afternoon; we can then go with it."

"Certainly, certainly; say you have my authority."

"Very good, sir."

Very good! He had been answering his own suggestions with "very good" until he was sick of the sound of the words. Very good! It was not very good. The disaster which the Colonel had described had taken place miles from where they were, and its only result, so far as they were concerned, would be an extension of the wretchedly monotonous existence they were leading. Oh, Jim was sick of the war and wanted peace!

It might have been imagination—probably was—but Vraille fancied he noticed a curious expression on the faces of the hill-men they passed upon the road. H—— was a small serai eight or nine miles distant from camp, and while they had rested there through the hottest part of the day, he had noticed that the natives were chattering over their hubble-bubbles more excitedly than was usual even with their garrulous class; their talk was of nothing but the defeat of the Sahibs. The villagers, too, he thought, were eyeing the convoy with cynical malevolence. But

these fancies—for of course they were only fancies he kept to himself; and as Peter strode along with monotonous tramp, head down, shoulders swinging, soon turned his thoughts in other directions. Why had he received no letter for so long? Was she ill? But that could hardly be, for Judith would have sent her mistress's messages, and, besides, he often heard of Lucy through other people. What could be the meaning of her silence? The old doubts and fears that had once so harassed him had long since been dispelled under the influences of calm thought and cherished hope. She had been thoughtless, and perhaps foolish, sometimes; but these were but womanly failings, and had been forgiven long ago-and wellnigh forgotten in his day-dreams, in the recollection of her loveliness, in the prospect of soon seeing her again, in the firm resolve to live more for her in the bright future than he had done in the dull past. This thought had always been a reproach to him. But now a new anxiety had presented itself, and was increasing every day. Doubt, was it? Doubt that she really loved him? No! a thousand times no!—and yet his heart ached.

As he rode on, he watched a grey crow burying its beak into the side of a camel's carcass on the wayside—burying it deep into the poor beast's heart. He got closer and saw that the camel was not quite dead, but moving in the agonies of death. The crow, disturbed at its work by the approaching convoy, lifted its head, its beak dripping; then, lazily flapping its wings, rose heavily into the air, leaving its prey dead.

"Ugh! horrible; horrible brute!-pitiless, remorse-

less vampire!" And then he laughed. "The Romans looked on crows as omens," he muttered.

He was moody and pre-occupied, and as he had failed to listen with attention to Colonel Dare's remarks, that officer had ridden on in front. Between them straggled camels, bullocks, four or five wagons, and a handful of Pathans by way of escort, with a few Sowars. Six miles of weary road lay before them, and the afternoon was wearing on. Phew! it was no weather for marching; the air was stifling, the stillness of it phenomenal; and the fierce rays of the declining sun as they struck his neck and temples under his helmet seemed to be burning holes into his very brain. Tramp, tramp; five miles now, and then Doctor Dick, and a pleasant evening. Tramp, tramp; what beautiful eyes the boy had-like a woman's. But all the girlish bloom of his complexion had flown—it was the work—he had been very hard-worked, lately tramp, tramp—his face was longer and much thinner, his large eyes larger—yes, much larger—he was beginning to look more like a man than a-

What was that? The boom of a distant gun! Impossible! And yet the same sound had electrified every man in the straggling line, and every man, as if with common consent, stood still. Hark! Another—and again another!

Colonel Dare came galloping back. "There's firing on ahead—I heard it distinctly—in the direction of the camp. There it is again!"

"I hear it, sir," said Vraille. The calmness of his voice grated on his senses; it was unnatural—a moment before his heart had seemed suddenly to stand

still, now it was beating hard against his ribs—it was not his own voice, but some other person's. To make sure, he repeated: "I hear it, sir." Yes, it was his own voice, but he had never heard it sound like that before.

"What shall we do?"

Jim, as he listened to the question, wondered whether his own face was pale like that—paler, probably, for it was not normally so florid as the Colonel's; and yet he heard the same slow distinctness in the voice that answered: "That, sir, is for you to decide." What made those same words come again just now?

"We—we had better turn back, perhaps; don't you think so?"

"Turn back-very good, sir."

Then, as he rode along the line giving the necessary instructions, the details of the situation flashed in quick succession across his mind, and he seemed to grasp and realise each with almost painful distinctness. Five or six miles on, not quite so many back; a good road, but firing, to the front; a bad road and reinforcements to the rear. Yes, a sensible order. A hanging cliff of rock and boulders to the left, a dry nullah and undulating country beyond to the right; a winding road bending round the cliff, and very little view—a nasty place rather to defend. If the convoy were indeed cut off, what chance of escape was there? How many men available for defence? Three or four Sowars, useless in such a position except on foot, and a dozen Pathans—possibly natives of the country. Some of these Pathans had been behaving badly lately,

and hanging parades had not been altogether unknown in certain districts. Another boom, and then another! The faint, far-off rattle of musketry—very faint, but yet unmistakably distinguishable. Could the firing be heard in those villages a mile or so behind?—perhaps not; but only perhaps, for the atmosphere was strangely still, and on days such as this the sound of the evening gun would travel eight miles or more. The villagers and hill-men on the road had looked aggressive. Altogether the position wore an ugly look, and the order to turn back was wise. But could the order be carried out, and the retreat on H—— effected in time?

All was babble and confusion in the convoy; from momentary and absolute rest it had started suddenly into excited movement. The natives chattered and gesticulated; the sepoys, gathering together in a knot, murmured beneath their voices; while the sowars alone sat grimly calm upon their horses. The camels gurgled angrily, resenting the sharp tugs given to their nose strings by their drivers, who in the excitement of the moment turned this way and that, heedless of the pain they were inflicting; the bullocks, left to their own devices, were trying to toss their burdens over their heads, but, caught by the horns in the connecting bands of their double packs, could only circle round their grounded loads; the cattle, jostled and pushed in the press, some struggling to reach the solitary clumps of grass that sprang every here and there out of the sand and stone; others with lifted head and neck outstretched lowed mournfully; and all the time the puffing dust rose up in clouds from under the shuffling feet, and added disorder to disorder.

But high above the din there rang a loud clear voice—through the press there pushed a large, ungainly horse. "Turn the wagons round," came the command in Hindustani; "put the cattle in between the wagons front and rear! Divide that escort—half of you to the front; come, double up—no time to waste in talking!" Squeezing his horse in here, urging him on there, using persuasion in one place, force in another, the rider, directing, helping, encouraging, threatening, himself saw to the completion of each order that he issued, and then rode back to make his report:

"All ready, sir, except one wagon; we cannot turn it where it is—the road is too narrow; but we can pass it—shall we leave it?"

"No, no, we must not leave anything behind, it would be looted—better try again."

"Very good, sir."

"Come, men, the Colonel Sahib has given his order; the Colonel Sahib means to be obeyed—and so do I, his Excellency's humble servant."

But the drivers cared nothing for the wagon, and in their sullen faces showed only too plainly their reluctance to obey the Sahib's command.

"Come," sang out the voice once more, but with a sterner tone in it this time, "his Excellency's order must be obeyed"—and seizing a whip from a man standing near, he draws the lash of it slowly through his hand. The wagon begins to move; the work is hard; the wheels balance on the edge of the incline; the road is narrow, too narrow; the men spring aside,

and with a rush and heavy crash the wagon bounds down the bank and falls upon its side into the nullah.

"Look, Sahib! Look upon the mountain where they come! We shall die, we shall all die!"

On the hill-side, beyond the nullah, having sprung, as it seems, from the very ground, come men. How many? Impossible to count!—one here, two there, half a dozen yonder; perhaps in all some five-and-thirty, perhaps more. Moving singly from stone to stone, from bank to bank, from boulder to boulder, slowly and cautiously they creep on towards the road. The flutter of their loose white clothing, the glitter, every now and then, of a naked knife, betrays their movements, but not a sound do they make, not a shot do they fire. Here and there among the stones, now one man, now another, can be seen, but nothing more.

- "See, sir, as I thought, we are to be attacked. Have you any orders?"
- "Yes, yes, prepare for the attack—issue my orders, please."
 - "Block the road front and rear with wagons?"
 - "Certainly, certainly."
 - "Divide the escort?"
 - "Yes."
 - "Collect the cattle in between?"
 - "Why in between?"
- "Their bodies, if they're shot, will give some sort of cover."
- "Oh, very well; do what you consider necessary, Vraille—say it is with my authority."
 - "I've done all that; anything else?"

"No, nothing that I know of. Look here, Vraille, there is something the matter with the cylinder of my revolver; can you put it right?"—his fingers are fidgeting with the weapon. It is snatched from his hand—a moment's pause, and it is handed back.

"There, sir, you will find it all right now; there was not much the matter. Have you plenty of cartridges? If not, I can give you some; we shall want them."

In the speaker's face there is a look of strange exultation; his eyes flash with the fire of a wild enthusiasm, although his voice is modulated and low; but about the corners of his mouth hovers a half-playful, half-cynical smile. He is not a handsome man, but at the moment a touch of something like inspiration seems to lend his features a certain heroic beauty.

"You would wish me," he said, "to take charge of the other end of the line while you remain here?"

"Certainly, certainly; I was just going to suggest some arrangement of that sort."

"And we shall not want our horses now?"

"No, of course not."

"I'll report anything unusual, if I can; I shall only be over there, where you see those two wagons. Good luck, sir," and he turned to go.

"Vraille, Vraille, one moment! Do you consider we are in danger?"

"Very great danger, sir;" and he is gone.

Pushing through the cowering crowd, he reached the other limit of the line, where he flung himself from his horse's back, and passing the reins over the animal's head, tied them to the shaft of a wagon.

Two wagons at right angles here blocked the road, one across it, leaving only a narrow exit near the cliff, the other parallel to its outer edge, a similar arrangement to that made in the place he had just left a hundred yards or so to the right. Between these points were huddled cattle, natives, camels, the latter crouching on their bellies, and lining the edge of the nullah-bank. Away over the maidan were galloping a score or more of beasts that had broken loose, and chasing them as many men—hill-men, lured from their original design by the hopes of easier loot.

"Reserve your fire and wait my orders," said the European voice that spoke Hindustani so fluently. Vraille was standing behind the sepoys who lined the wagons, and as he spoke he hitched the cartridge-pouch on his belt a little further to the front and loosened his sword knot.

The fluttering garments of those beyond the nullah were approaching nearer and nearer, until the faces of their wearers could almost be distinguished. Hovering from cover to cover, closer and closer they came; still not a shot was fired, not a sound heard, save that made by the jostling cattle; even the terrified natives cowered behind the beasts in panic-stricken silence.

Nearer and nearer come the turbaned heads, showing every now and then above the stones; while behind them, far away on the horizon under the blood-red ball of the setting sun, is gathering a cloud, rising up out of the earth, up, up to the very sky, and onward towards the scene of the impending struggle. The air is absolutely still.

Then suddenly from behind a boulder rose the form

of a tall thin man, stripped to his skin. Above his head he flung his arms, holding in one hand a three-foot knife, in the other a short dagger. With the yell, "Allah! Allah!" he rushed forward to the nullah.

"Amuck! amuck!" murmured many a horrorstricken voice upon the road.

"Fire!" came the word of command, sharp and clear—but there was no responding rattle. The man who gave the command opened the breech-lock of his revolver, looked down, and shut it again with a snap. Click, click—he raised the hammer. Then from beyond the nullah came the first sharp crack, and a sepoy fell forward upon his face.

"Allah! Allah!" The naked man has reached the

nullah.

"Fire!" came the command a second time.

"Sahib, Sahib, he is a sacred man—" The muzzle of a revolver is thrust into the speaker's face.

"Order the men to fire, or by the god of your faith I blow your brains out! The Sahib has said it." A rattling peel, and the fanatic falls dead.

"Hah!" A subdued murmur of relief ran through the crowd of anxious watchers, and again they buried their heads behind the bodies of the crouching camels.

A momentary pause ensued, as if the heart of every man who saw that volley had suddenly stood still. The smoke hung over the nullah in curling wreaths, slowly ascending and dispersing. Frightened at the noise, the cattle began to push restlessly one against the other, opening gaps in their huddled ranks. Many of them then rushed down the bank to the front, and galloped madly down the nullah, again pursued

by hill-men. Then from above the boulders rose bearded faces, and glittering in front of them the long barrels of twenty or thirty bandooks; then puffs of smoke and sharp reports. Now the camels could no longer be restrained, but rising to their feet, pushed and jostled one another in their fright; some falling heavily to the ground again, others rushing down the nullah-bank.

Revolver in hand, a tall man walked along the line: it was James Vraille. Six times he fired as he went, then, reloading as he turned, six times more as he came back. Eight of the most restless beasts struggled no longer; and the natives in the road, crawling on their hands and knees through blood and dust, crept under the quivering carcasses for shelter.

Another volley from the front, followed by straggling shots: to right and left the rifles of the Pathans now answer: men drop on either side; the stillness of the air is rent with groans and shrieks: the attack still presses on through the heavy-hanging smoke.

But out beyond the fight rises a dense and dusky veil, up, up above the setting sun, and bringing twilight rapidly. Higher and higher it surges, closer and closer it rolls; the sultry air begins to tremble, and circling pillars of ascending dust stalk like wandering ghosts across the plain.

The firing of the bandooks ceased; the rifles rattled on. Then through the din was heard the clattering noise of stones rolling one upon another, and here and there, through breaks in the curling smoke, could be seen the flashing of naked knives brandished in the nullah-bed. "Now for the thick of it! Fire one more volley! Ha! There go four of them! Trust to your bayonets—they are of good steel. . . . It is Kismet! Glory!—or the happy hunting grounds—it is the Great God's decree!" and leaping upon the wagon in front of him, he fires his revolver right and left, till it is empty; then draws his sword and holds it high above his head.

But surely all is lost, for the crowd presses in from the right behind a line of sepoys firing quickly as they come. They are being driven in. The flank is turned; the wagons at that end are lost; Afghans clamber over them, and with shrieks of hellish delight hack down all who obstruct their path. A rush is made for the narrow exit on the other flank, and it is soon choked with the struggling bodies of the natives. On the left of the retreating sepoys one figure fighting for dear life stumbles as it retreats—falls—and with the rattle of displaced earth and stones, slides out of sight into the nullah.

"The Colonel Sahib has fallen! Come, two of you, follow me!" None follow him. Alone he springs into the nullah, and, reaching the fallen wagon, stands astride upon it, guarding the helpless man behind him. His head bare, his revolver dangling useless at his side, his sword gleaming as he strikes, the man upon the wagon, streaming with sweat and bespattered with blood, fights like a maniac. "Ha! another down—one more! There! To hell with you!"

Then all is sudden darkness.

The dust-storm has obliterated the scene. The veil of blackness with bellying front, borne on by the

rushing wind, has enveloped man and beast, road and nullah, friend and foe. All are as one—as nothing. Like a wild sea rushing in upon the shore, the billows of dust surge upwards and roll on, and the tearing wind lashes all it meets and strikes it to the earth. Without lull or pause the tempest rages—and will rage for an hour or more.

When Vraille collected his scattered senses he found himself lying on his back looking up at a clear starlight night. All was still.

It was pleasant lying there, looking up at the calm heaven above him, and he felt strangely stiff and weary and disinclined to move; so weary that he closed his eyes again and tried to sleep. But his pillow was uncomfortable, and putting up his hand, he found it was a stone. Then he tried to raise himself upon his other arm, but found he could not; so he let his head fall upon the stone again and tried to think. As the glimmering rays of recollection slowly began to light up his dull memory, he heard a groan, and stretching out his hand in the direction of the sound, he felt the arm of some one lying close beside him. "Who's that?" asked a voice whose well-known tones at once brought back the past.

"It's I, Colonel—Vraille!" He could scarcely speak the words, his tongue felt like a strip of leather.

"Oh, I'm in such pain; I've been suffering agonies for hours and hours, and thinking of death. Oh, for a little water—if I only had one drop of water I think I should live. I thought I was alone; I could not move. Get water—ever such a little."

VOL. I.

Overcoming his feeling of lethargy with an effort, Vraille struggled into a sitting position and looked at the figure beside him. It was not a pleasant sight. The poor Colonel lay upon his side huddled up under the wheels of the wagon; his face and clothes were smothered in dirt and dust, and the upper part of one leg was saturated with blood.

"You are wounded," said Vraille; "here, wait a bit, don't move; I'll see what I can do."

"Get me something to drink—there's a flask in my holster if you can find it—it was full of brandy and water when we left; be quick—bring it here." With difficulty the Colonel gasped out the words, and Vraille, as he rose to his feet and tried to moisten his lips with his tongue, understood his difficulty.

There was no moon, but the stars twinkled brightly. Vraille, stumbling as he went, made his way to the nullah bank, and, with what light there was, tried to find an easy place of ascent. The bank was not steep, but his left arm seemed benumbed, and with the use of only one he doubted his climbing powers. Not a sound could be heard but the rattling of the stones his feet displaced as he clambered up the bank, making slow and painful progress. When he reached the top he found the road strewn with the bodies of beasts and men. He looked into the faces of the latter to see if he could render assistance; but the eyes that met his were all glazed and staring, and as he stumbled on he heard not a single sound. The contents of the wagons had been thrown out upon the ground; but anything of the least value they had contained had been carried off by the plunderers. Not a rifle, a sabre, a saddle, a living animal, could be seen: the convoy had been looted most effectually. "This," he thought to himself, as he stumbled on, "is the reason of the stillness; and to the fact of lying down there out of sight in the nullah while the pillage was going on we owe our lives, I suppose; and yet some of those sepoys must have escaped through the storm."

He found the Colonel's pony, dead and stripped of saddle and bridle; but after a little search round about he saw a wicker flask half buried in the dust. He snatched it up and began to unscrew the top, but securing it again very quickly, he thrust it into his pocket. "Not quite so bad as that yet," he muttered, and, retracing his steps, made for the other end of the line. Here he failed to find any sign of Peter, dead or alive; but he pounced upon a bagful of biscuits lying under a wagon, and put one of them in his mouth. He munched and munched, but could not swallow so much as a crumb, and so, hungry as he was, spat the biscuit out again. Putting half a dozen of them in his pocket, he made the best of his way back to Colonel Dare.

"It's all right, Colonel," he said; "here's the flask—here, take it and drink."

But the Colonel did not answer, and Vraille, peering anxiously into his face, saw that he could not answer. He unscrewed the top of the flask and thrust the neck between the fainting man's teeth. They closed upon it, and the parched lips sucked in the liquid, drop by drop at first, then gulp by gulp, until it was all gone. Once Vraille made a slight motion as if to draw the flask away, but instantly the other's hands closed upon it, and held it to his mouth until it was empty. Then

he released his hold, and Jim sighed; the wounded man was not accountable for his actions, that was certain.

Ah," said the Colonel, drawing a long breath, "that has put new life into me."

"Come then," said Vraille, shortly, "we must be going; get to the camp by morning we must somehow."

"I doubt if I can walk, Vraille; what shall we do if I can't walk?" For the first time he tried to move. "Oh!" he cried in pain, "I can't; I knew I could not."

"You must," said Jim.

"You won't leave me, will you?"

"No, I won't leave you; but I must take you with me somehow, if I have to carry you on my back."

Jim meanwhile set to work feeling all the Colonel's bones, regardless of his groans and exhortations to be careful. "Look here," he said at last, "you are not so bad as you think; you'll get along right enough when I have tied your leg up; just lie quiet till I've found a bit of linen or something." He groped about among the stones, and close by picked up his helmet. "Ah, happy thought," he muttered; and ripping off the pugree, bound it tightly round the Colonel's wounded limb. "Now," he said rather sharply, "get up." Colonel Dare, with his assistance, struggled to his feet, and held on to the wagon for support. "Oh, my head, my head!" he groaned. "Oh, the ground is trembling and rocking, and everything is swimming round and round."

"Here, eat a biscuit, if you can; it'll do you good."
While the Colonel was munching the biscuit, Jim

searched about again among the stones. "It ought to be somewhere close," he muttered; "I know I had it, but I can't remember how I lost it."

"What are you looking for, Vraille?"

"My sword; you haven't seen it, have you?"

"Oh, never mind your sword; for Heaven's sake let's get on, I feel steadier now."

"But I do mind it. I have lost my revolver, that's bad enough, but we haven't got a cartridge between us, so yours is no good, and I'm not going to take you five or six miles like that without a weapon of some sort." Thus speaking, or rather hoarsely gasping out the words, he continued his search, and at last, lying close under the wagon, found what he sought. He picked it up by the blade in his hurry; his fingers stuck to it; with a shudder he pushed it home into the scabbard. "That is a horrible sensation," he said to himself, and then aloud—

"Now, Colonel, come along; how do you feel?"

"Better, better; but I shall never reach the camp alive—never! I know it, I know it. And, Vraille, I have some things I want to tell you while they're on my mind; there's that four hundred I still owe you."

"Oh, come, sir, come, this is no time to talk about that. What do you suppose I care about four million now? I've never given the thing a thought from that day to this; indeed I haven't. There, make your mind easy, and just think about the camp. Come along!"

Without more ado, he passed his sound arm round the Colonel's waist, and half-pushed, half-dragged him down the nullah.

"I cannot do it—I cannot walk on these stones;

hadn't we better take the road?" said the Colonel between his groans.

"Not just yet, any way," said Jim, grimly; "your nerves would not stand it."

"Is it a horrible sight?"

Vraille did not answer.

"Tell me, is it a horrible sight? Is it like a battle-field, do you think? You saw it, I suppose, when you went up; but you couldn't see the wagon from the road—no, you couldn't see that. It was too dark, wasn't it?—of course, much too dark. But I've got some things I want to tell you."

"Look here, Colonel," said Jim, halting for a moment, "try and understand what I am saying. Our safety depends on our walking. If we talk we shall be overheard, perhaps, and then we may never reach the camp. Now, don't talk, Colonel, only walk—walk on and on, you know."

"All right, Vraille, I'll try and do what you say."

With this understanding between them, they crawled along for nearly an hour without speaking, often stumbling, sometimes falling. At last the Colonel could stand it no longer. "Vraille," he said, "I must rest—I must indeed, just for a minute."

"Very well, sit on that stone; I think we're pretty safe now, we're a mile and a half from the wreck, if they take it into their heads to come back."

"What I wanted to say was this, Vraille, and I will speak. If I get out of this alive, your money is safe."

"Tush!"

"If not, I have left a record of the debt among my papers. But, oh, I shall be safe in an hour or two,

though I did not think it while I was lying under that wagon. You see, Vraille, I am a very poor man—very poor indeed, that's the truth—and if anything should happen to me I do not know what would become of my daughter Edith. She would be left without a penny in the world. That is what made me so anxious. You quite understand that, don't you?"

"I understand what it is to have a wife and child that I want to see again."

"But I have no wife now, that makes it so much worse for me; you cannot understand that—no, no, of course not—but as you are the only person I have left to speak to, I implore you, should anything—not that it will, of course not—but—to do anything for her you can, help her in any way, should she want help."

"Yes, yes, of course, Colonel; but come along, another couple of hours and you'll be safe, and then you can go back to her hale and hearty, and look after her yourself. Come, pull yourself together, and let's jog on." He spoke kindly; for the first time in their acquaintance the old gentleman seemed to be showing thought and consideration for another, and though it was only now in his light-headedness, it was nevertheless a sign of the existence of kindly feeling latent somewhere in the selfishness of his saner moments.

"Just one moment more, and then I'll come."

Spite of his fleeting wits, he made a great effort to pull himself together and regain some semblance of his old dignity. "Some years ago, Vraille, when you were serving under my command, I saved you, you know, by a sharp——"

[&]quot;Come along, let's go on now."

"I might have pressed the charge, you know—"

"Am I to listen to this babble and say nothing? Come, Colonel, come, or I must leave you here."

This, then, was why Dare had never mentioned the court-martial to him from the day it had taken place until now! The man was babbling, and fast going off his head; but still, in his wanderings, he was blurting out what evidently was upon his mind, and what, no doubt, he conceived to be the truth. As poor Jim stumbled slowly on, holding up the feeble frame of his companion and listening to his unintelligible murmurs, he thought of his child and his wife, of justice and injustice.

For two weary hours the pair dragged their heavy steps over the sand and stones, now striking the road and making better progress, now stumbling along the bed of a nullah, or, in places where the road offered likelihood of ambush, walking parallel to it across country. Often they had to stop and rest, for the weight of the Colonel's body grew heavier and heavier on Jim's arm; once, where a filthy stream trickled by the road-side, Vraille lay upon his stomach and drank—drank until he could drink no more, and would have drunk had there been poison in every drop.

Away in the east a faint light betokened the coming of another day, and, straining his eyes to the utmost in the direction of the camp, Jim tried in vain to make out through the mists of the falling dew the outlines of the tents.

"Come, Colonel," he said wearily, "only a mile or so more, and an easy road; come, one struggle more, and we are safe." He passed his arm round the Colonel's waist once more and tried to force him on to his feet from off the stone on which he was sitting. But the man's energy was spent; he had made his final effort. With a sigh he sank into a heap upon the ground.

"Safe!" he said. "Yes, we are safe, and after years and years of wandering—long weary years. He sprang upon the wagon, I tell you! I saw him do it. One, two, three—I think it was three, but I cannot be quite sure. But the service we are engaged upon is important—more important than you think. Oh, yes, you may laugh, but I assure you I have my authority. There it is again! Did you hear it? Turn back, I say; turn back while there is yet time! He saved my life; but for him, Edith, only the workhouse; but that is too absurd—not a penny in the wide, wide world. Why, I have known the Victoria Cross given for less, indeed I have. There was a man once——"

The tints upon the horizon deepened, and the heavens blushed with a rosy red. Phantoms of the night skimmed across the maidan to their hiding-places; skulking jackals howled and hurried on; night-jars cackled out their last few notes, while bats flapped homewards, and vultures swooped and screamed through the heavy air. Shafts of light, shot from the east, tipped the stones with gold, and, little by little, the road opened up through the mists, and showed a long straight line. Straining eyes and ears, Vraille stood in front of the senseless man, looking down it. What was it? Another party of murdering thieves? Was he to draw that bloody sword again and fight once more, only one against ten—twenty? No! Thank God! help at last!

"Poor old chap! What a sight! There, hold up, Jim, dear old fellow, rest your head against my knee. Now take a little of this." It was a soft, sweet voice, full, overflowing with womanly tenderness. "Better for that, aren't you? Come, a little more—so. That's right. Now lean on me; put your arm—the other one, old chap—round my neck. We've got a dhoolie for you here. We came to bring home your dead body, so cheer up—you're not dead yet by a long way."

"Ah, Dick, it was a near thing."

"We know all about it; some sepoys came in an hour or two ago and told us. We had a bit of a brush ourselves, you know, but the storm blew 'em away like flies."

"How's old Dare?"

"Don't you bother your head about him any more. He's right enough, and if he only talks to-morrow as he is talking now, it means the V.C. for you, my brave old pal."

CHAPTER X.

PINES AND RHODODENDRONS.

SIMLA society sparkled with stars that season; and among so many shining lights, where none were small, it was something to be a planet of the first magnitude. Ah, Lucy Vraille outshone them all, talk as they might, smile and ogle as they might, dress as they might! Little Mrs. Lovejoy, who at seventeen had married the General when he was—well, some said seventy, but people in India, especially unemployed generals, are apt to look older than they are, and very likely he was not more than sixty-five-little Mrs. Lovejoy was gay and pretty and pleasant to talk to because of her neverfailing light-heartedness; and Mrs. Palmira, that clever consort of the astute Deputy Commissioner, was, no doubt, excellent company; but Mrs. Vraille, the wife of old Jim Vraille up at the front in the Transport or something, was the woman to know. Hers was the jampan to walk beside, the villa to which to be asked to tiffen or supper, the ball programme to be written in! At her shrine the worshippers crowded, in her bright light they fluttered, and sometimes singed their wings. And grass widows were innumerable that season, male lepidoptera—butterflies and moths—somewhat scarce, so that Mrs. Vraille's pre-eminence was all the more a matter for self-congratulation. Fair ladies, who wished to flirt or dance, could not discriminate too daintily or philander too long with their favours—she who hesitated stood out. But Lucy, among the very few, was not one of those troubled with the common anxieties and doubts that harassed the weaker of her weaker sex. She was above emulation and beyond competition. She could pick and choose as she pleased without detriment to her enjoyment. And she did pick and choose—as often as her fancy prompted her; and she did enjoy herself—immensely.

"Oh, she is first, the rest nowhere!" the favourite of the hour would exclaim.

"Undoubtedly she takes the apple," the last favourite but one would mournfully admit, "and there's more of the Venus than the Psyche about her, after all."

While the war was at its height, and during the early part of the summer, it had been a comparatively simple matter to gain an ephemeral reputation as the Beauty's latest choice—to snatch a waltz here, a ride there; to hold her hand, her waist, or her pony, as the case might be, through shorter or longer periods of transient beatitude; to bask for an hour, a day, a week even, in the sunshine of her approving smiles. But when, a little later on, the place began to fill, these happy chances came so seldom that they were scarcely worth the physical trouble and mental anxiety of waiting for. Still men did wait, and did hope, until Herbert Rook entered the lists, when they waited on, but hoped not. It was of little use attempting to compete with such a man; his reputation was too well established, his honours too thick upon him; his advantages, bygone, present, and to come, in the struggle for supremacy too potent to make head against. He had ridden into Simla with victory written on his smiling face. It was a foregone conclusion, and none knew it better than he. In a week he was master of the field.

Ah. Simla was the blissful centre of the great Indian circle of enjoyment; it was the vortex of the whirl of gaiety; it was the nucleus of all that was entrancingly charming. Never in all her life had Lucy been so thoroughly happy; not a day came that did not bring with it some new pleasure, some fresh delight, some additional triumph to record upon her long scroll of conquests. Life in Simla was life indeed; all other existences were but vegetation. And then, when the cup of her enjoyment seemed full even to the brim, Herbert Rook—the man universally admired and made much of, whose individual attention any woman of her acquaintance would have given five years of life to call her own, as she, Lucy, could—the man who had pitted her beauty against that of the women of all Asia, had come to sweeten the nectar in her cup and cause it to overflow with the very excess of pride and pleasure. What he said she knew to be true. There was not a face, a figure, a wardrobe in the Himalayas to compare to her face, her figure, her wardrobe. Could she not, if she chose, fill her programme three times over for every ball before that programme was even printed? not men ask her to dance by the score, and could she not refuse them by the score? Did not women frown at her, and could she not afford to smile? Her success she felt to be complete, the zenith of her glory attained, the top of her ambition fulfilled. She was queen of the season, with Bertie Rook chief courtier.

But holding court entailed expenditure of money,

and Jim was becoming a regular "screw." He never sent her a cheque now without an accompanying moral lecture, and sometimes went so far as to divide her just demands by two, saying that she must try and clothe herself out of her own purse. It was not fair; he had married her under false pretences, and, indeed, had owned as much himself.

She was in straits, and consulted Mrs. Palmira, who had stood her friend before. Mrs. Palmira's opinion was that a generous husband's knowledge of domestic economy should of course be confined to addition and multiplication; her advice was contained in the one word "owe."

"But I must borrow before I can owe," protested Lucy, her beautiful eyes wide open with interest and sagacity.

"That, my dear, is the wisest remark you ever made in your life, I suspect," was Mrs. Palmira's reply, and Lucy felt quite pleased. Scores of men had told her she was witty and talented and clever and "so satirical," and many other nice things, but no one had ever called her wise before. Jim, she had sometimes fancied, thought her foolish, but she was not so foolish, after all her experience, as to expect appreciation from a husband. Jim's opinion was not worth a button, whereas Mrs. Palmira's—every one respected that.

"Yes," she said, "I'm not a perfect fool, you know. I'm not, as your friend Mr. Hicks would say, in leading-strings by long chalks. I know a thing or two, and one of them is, that I can't owe any more without borrowing."

"What on earth do you want money for?"

"Oh, come," ejaculated Lucy in surprise, "you of all people to ask such a silly question!"

"I really can't see, all the same; you have a house to live in, horses to ride, food to eat, servants to wait upon you—all paid for, and what else you want, I really can't conceive. Money won't buy wisdom, you know."

"Of course it won't; and who wants it? How absurd you are! But, seriously, there are some bills I really must pay before I can order anything more—even Pelliti has refused to send me in some things I wanted for another little supper, and I've been obliged to put it off."

"Terrible!" said Mrs. Palmira.

"Yes, isn't it? Now, really, what would you do if you were me? Do help me with your advice; you helped me once before, you remember."

"Yes, I do remember. I am not likely to forget, with young Hicks dancing attendance on me all day long. That horse of his keeps me in perpetual remembrance—I wish it didn't; every race Mustapha wins jogs my memory most unpleasantly. No, my dear, I am afraid I cannot help you any more. I have a conscience, though people do not generally think so."

So Lucy, for the first time for many a long month, went about among the pines and rhododendrons looking dejected and unhappy. What was she to do? Gradually get dowdy, and wear old gowns? Cease to entertain her friends, and fall in every one's estimation? Cede the first place to Mrs. Lovejoy? Perhaps fail to win fresh applause from Bertie Rook! Mrs. Palmira had deserted her in her hour of need, and she would not confide in Mrs. Lovejoy; for Mrs. Lovejoy, she knew, would not help her, and objectless confidences with heartless women were not at all to her taste.

There was no help for it, she must apply once more to Jim. She did apply, and in course of time received the equivalent of a ten-pound note. Ten pounds! It was little better than useless. But she would not have felt so hurt if he had sent the sum, paltry as it was, without remarks; it was the accompanying letter that was so galling.

"It is not, my darling," he wrote, "that I grudge you the money; but I really have not so much to spare as I had. Indeed I have not; I wish I had, and you should have it all—all. But, dear, your request came at a most unfortunate time. I have been obliged—I could not help myself—to lend a fellow here a couple of months' pay; that means a little less than a thousand rupees, and consequently I am rather short. But I will send——"

This was the sting of it. What right had he to be lending money to "fellows" when his wife was in want? A thousand rupees would have helped her over the stile comfortably, and enabled her to carry on the war; and the thousand rupees that by rights belonged to her were given to a "fellow." She would show him that her pride was wounded by not writing to him again until he apologised. Each letter she received she tore open to see if it contained a cheque, and if it did not, flung it into the drawer that was already chockfull of his effusions.

Deprived of all sorts of minor comforts, she struggled on, wearing the same dejected air, until at last Bertie asked her the cause of her distress.

"What is it ails my bright Lucy?" he said; "why is she no longer gay? What is it, Mater Dolorosa?"

"Oh, nothing, nothing; I am a little worried, that's all!"

What a pretty name—Mater Dolorosa! He always had some pretty new name to call her by every time they met.

"Come, Lucy, surely we are too old friends to be afraid of trusting one another with our little secrets" (Lucy's little secret was a common topic of teatable talk, by the way); "and if you do not tell me yours, I shall only think it is something you would rather I did not know, and then the charm of our intimacy would be gone."

"It is not about you; nothing to do with you, except——" The thought of Pelliti and the indefinitely postponed supper-party prompted the word; but she stopped in time.

"Except? Ah, why will you not trust me? Have I ever attempted to deceive you?"

"No, no, no!" protested Lucy, earnestly.

A ghost of a smile flitted across his handsome face, but she did not notice it, and he went on—

"Then why will you not confide in me? Do you doubt that if you were in trouble I would try to comfort you? or if you were in any little difficulty, let us suppose, that I would do my utmost to help you? I might not prove altogether powerless, you know. Surely, Lucy, you know me too well to doubt me."

"Yes, yes; it's not that, but——"

"And surely you feel some of the sympathy I have for you; some of the great——" A sigh smothered the word.

"I know—I know, Bertie; but it's hardly——'

"There is one thing," he interrupted gently, passing his arm over the back of her chair and inclining his head towards her that his words might be all the more low and impressive,—"there is one thing you may not know, and that is the secret desire that is always upon me to render you some trifling service in return for all your kindness and hospitality to me. You never give me a chance"—he asked her to luncheons and picnic parties by the score, and she always accepted such invitations—"you are too good—too generous ever to suppose that you have put me under obligations, and too single-minded ever to think that I might wish for a happy chance of repaying some of them, however inadequately."

Then he dilated upon her charms and personal attractions, until, little by little, as surely as the corkscrew draws the cork, he extracted the secret that he

already possessed.

"Is that all?" he laughed, when Lucy's story had been unfolded. "Is that all?"—and he laughed again—a subdued, melodious laugh. "Why, Lucy, dear, what a sweet little simpleton you are! There is nothing in that. Why did you not tell me long ago, instead of pining over such a trifle?"

"If he hadn't been so mean," said Lucy, "of course I should not have been obliged to tell you, even now."

"Of course not; but as he has done me a service, trouble no more, ma mie."

This was a friend indeed! She had never felt the same towards any man in her life of the hundreds she had known as she did towards Bertie. Ah, what a cruel mistake her marriage had been! It was a

terrible thing—she felt the fact in all its force just now—to be mated to a creature who appreciated neither her beauty nor her virtues; it was a terrible thing, after the blissful life she had been leading, to look forward to those sultry plains, those dismal evenings, those abominable books that he tried to read aloud, those dreary homilies about aims and objects and purposes. Oh, dear, the bare recollection of it all was positively distressing! And what right had he to dictate, or seem to dictate, in his letters what she should or should not do? She was her own mistress, free to do as she pleased while he was away. Ah, while he was away—yes, while he was away! Quite so, while he was away. But he would come back-and then? Oh, bother! "What a fool I was," she said to herself, "to marry in such a hurry; it was my mother's fault. He and I have not an idea in common, and there must be some way out of such a ridiculous position. I see what men are now; I can tell those worth marrying, and those not. The Transport, indeed!"

That her husband should be serving in the Transport was a special source of annoyance and humiliation to Mrs. Vraille. Whenever she was asked what Jim was doing at the front, the invariable remark of the questioner, when she answered, was, "Oh, in the Transport!" in a tone of toleration excessively irritating. Transport officers were non-combatants, which meant, so she understood, that they drove cattle and never did any fighting. Now Mr. Rook's brother was an A.D.C.; and though Jim at one time had talked a great deal about getting an A.D.C.-ship, it had all ended in talk and nothing more. The

Transport, she supposed, was considered good enough for him. But the Civil Service was better than any soldiering; Bertie was thought far more of than any colonel or major, not to say captain. Bertie—she wondered what he was going to do for her, he had not said.

She was not left long in doubt; Signor Pelliti and one or two other gentlemen sent in their accounts receipted. The delicacy of the whole proceeding enchanted her; Bertie was a noble fellow as well as a nobleman. She went here, there and everywhere in search of him with thanks—and a kiss even, if he cared to take it—upon her lips. But Mr. Rook was a wise man in his generation, and a diplomat to boot; he had gone, she learnt, upon a secret mission into the interior, and would not be back for a week or ten days. At the end of a fortnight he had not returned, and every additional day's absence increased her desire to see him. She missed him terribly, for, somehow, her old admirers did not rush to fill his vacant place so eagerly as might have been expected, though fresh ones, who did not know of his existence, were fairly attentive. But they were none of them like him.

Meanwhile official Simla was in a flutter; chuprassees rushed hither and thither with minutes and large envelopes, and the news of the British defeat was upon everybody's lips. A garrison was cut off and cooped up within the walls of an isolated fort daily expecting to be attacked. A march, destined afterwards to live in history, was to be undertaken, perilous as it was, as the only means of relief. All this interested Lucy but little; she had received a letter from Jim—no remit-

tance—dated a few days after the catastrophe, so he at any rate was safe enough. He just alluded to the disaster at the end of his letter, but for the most part it was filled with complaints about himself, verbal meanderings into subjects of no special interest—most of them sheer nonsense—and, so far as she had deciphered the hurriedly-written sheets, questions about the child. She put the letter in the drawer with the rest, and thought no more about it until a few days afterwards at a picnic party.

The subject of a ball was under discussion. It was to have been the ball of the season, but there was a rumour current that it would be indefinitely postponed, if not put off altogether, on account of the recent news. Lucy was listening with the deepest interest to what Mrs. Palmira, Mrs. Lovejoy, and their usual accompaniments, Mr. Hicks and Major Hercules, had to say upon the subject.

"It is sure to be all right," said sanguine Mrs. Lovejoy at last; "the General tells me that they have squared it, and he ought to know as he is on the committee."

"But for all that, it won't be for a jolly long time vet," sighed Major Hercules, looking affectionately at his inamorata pro tem.

"Time enough," said Mrs. Palmira; "long before I've outlived Mr. Hicks's fidelity, and time enough to give Bertie a chance of coming back-eh, Lucy?"

Lucy blushed with pleasure.

"By the way," asked young Hicks, "have you heard anything further of Jim, Mrs. Vraille?"

"Anything further!" repeated Lucy. "How do you mean?"

"What, don't you know?"

Then they all told her: Jim's convoy—at least one that he happened to be marching with, for of course Colonel Dare was in command—had been cut to pieces, and he and the Colonel had only escaped by the skin of their teeth.

- "They say he behaved splendidly," said Major Hercules.
 - "Who did?" asked Lucy.
 - "Why, not old Dare!" roared the giant in name.
- "And since you seem so ignorant of what every one is talking about," exclaimed Mrs. Lovejoy with all the good nature of womanly friendship, "and know so little of your own husband's affairs, perhaps I've got a nice little surprise in store for you. The General said this morning that the V.C. was talked of—unofficially, of course."
 - "Oh!" said Lucy.
- "But he only did his duty after all," objected bold young Hicks.
- "Wait till you do yours as well, then see what you think," said Hercules.
- "Serves you right, Mr. Hicks," said Mrs. Palmira to her youthful and eager swain. "Don't talk about things you don't understand, V.C.'s included."
- "You are jealous," continued Mrs. Lovejoy, adding her stroke to Hicks's chastisement, "because you could not get up to the front yourself, like Captain Vraille and Major Hercules, and a host of others."

This was touching the young gentleman on the raw. He writhed, and in defiance of Mrs. Palmira's warning eye, retorted hotly—

"Of course he behaved well, we all know that; but I say again he won't get the V.C., if it is only because the convoy was attacked by tribes supposed to be friendly, and the whole things will be hushed up as much as possible."

"Shut up!" said Mrs. Palmira, peremptorily, knowing that there was more truth than caution in the angry youth's remarks. Hicks did shut up; but other tongues were not so easily silenced, and a lady, who cared nothing for Mrs. Palmira's glances, started the subject afresh.

"I suppose you know," she said, addressing the company in general, "that the man he saved is dead."

"Dead! Colonel Dare dead! You don't say so!"

"So I heard this morning. I believe there is no doubt about it."

"Dear me," said Mrs. Palmira, quite pathetically, "it is only the other day, as it were, that I saw him; and we met his daughter at dinner—don't you remember, Lucy?—while she was staying with Mrs. Phelps."

Lucy remembered her distinctly—a dark plain girl,

who sang some German songs rather well.

"The Miss Dare I mean, Mrs. Vraille," said the lady with the news stiffly, "does not sing 'rather well,' she has a lovely voice, and is not particularly plain, either. Perhaps you are thinking of some one else?"

"Oh dear no," Lucy replied promptly; "it is the same. My husband took her in to dinner that night—he knew her in England—and I recollect he told me she was Colonel Dare's daughter. I certainly thought she was plain, but perhaps it was only the unbecoming dress she had on, and——"

"Any way," said the other, cutting in sharply on Lucy's reminiscences, "she is a friend of mine, and her father's death will be a terrible blow to her. She has no mother; the Colonel was not very well off, I fear, and she will be left without a penny in the world, and with scarcely a relation to help her. Indeed, I know she wished to try and earn her own living in England instead of coming out with her father, but he would not hear of it. What she will do now I really don't know."

"Dear, dear! How very sad! Poor thing!"
And then the conversation turned again upon the ball. Such is the mutability of human interests!

Miss Dare's affairs were matters of little consequence to Lucy, and she soon forgot all about them; but for some time to come she pondered over what she had heard about Jim. To begin with, she did not believe there was much truth in it. Jim was a non-combatant; and though she knew that a war was going on somewhere, and that battles of a kind were being fought, she had always imagined that the Afghans were the people killed, wounded, taken prisoners and that sort of thing, not the English, still less the non-combatant English. A war to her meant marching a long way off, shooting so many black men, and marching home again; a campaign, living in tents; a battle, a lot of men leaving those tents in the morning, going without dinner perhaps that day, and returning in the evening rather tired. Until now she had never dreamed of such a thing as Jim distinguishing himself; and, as it was, she had not the slightest idea what he had done. She supposed he had had a stroke of his usual good

luck; and she was decidedly glad, for people could no longer look upon her as the wife of a Transport officer who never fought. Jim's stroke of fortune would raise her in their estimation; she was glad, and, with one thing and another, quite happy again.

There were two other inmates of the little villa gladdened also by the news when it reached them. They expressed their feelings in different ways, and neither of them as the mistress of the house expressed hers.

"There's been dreadful fighting, baby boy," said one, "and the poor pretty soldiers that I showed you the pictures of many and many a time has been pouring out their blood—redder than the coats they don't wear in them parts—upon the dust, for their country and their Queen, and their pay, pretty chick! Lord love yer bright eyes, how they do stare, to be sure! I do believe as yer understands ivery blessed word as is said to yer. Now listen to Lalla, honey, and she'll tell yer—though why you should call me Lalla when my name's Judith and nothin' else, yer sweet innocence only knows."

"Lal-la, Lal-l-l-la," said an appreciative little voice, lingering over the labials.

"Lalla it shall be then—that's understood; I suppose the word comes handier to yer baby tongue. Well, they was fightin' and fightin' through the heat" (but she said 'eat) "of the day—all of 'em fightin', sargints, ginerals, corprils, drummers, sargint-majors and all; an' them as was left, when the fightin' was done, bleedin' as they was, had to march and march all through the night, without a band, without so much as a ration or a drop o' rum between 'em; no gee-gees to ride, no——"

"Gee-gee, gee-gee; gee-up, gee-gee!" Then followed gurgling sounds expressive of enthusiasm, and the little face of the listener looked up, his eyes sparkling with delight. He even tried to clap his hands, but they clung together when they met and refused to part; the little fingers clasped and unclasped themselves, then separated and wandered away down Judith's dress, until one of them found a button-hole, into which it crept. The baby eyes followed the investigations of the finger, and the baby mind lost the thread of the discourse in contemplating the mysteries of the button-hole.

"And one brave man—one big, brave man, who fought harder than them all, and bled the most, and had the least to eat and drink—came back about 'revelly' the next mornin'; and that big, brave man—now look at Lalla whilst she tells yer, sweet—was dadda! Now say it after Lalla, baby boy—dadda!"

"Dad—dee, daddee," repeated the struggling little tongue.

"Daddee'll do; it's near enough, and prettier p'r'aps. No, sit ye still now, an' don't ye wriggle to get down; them little legs 'll grow all crooked if they're allus walkin'—time enough for walkin'; talkin's different. Listen now to Lalla, boy, and try to talk. No? Well, what is it yer want, sweetheart?"

"Tonee, tonee—Lalla, tonee." A dimpled arm wandered out into the air, and a podgy little finger tried to point. There was not a soul on earth but one who could have interpreted the foolish little talk and the feeble little signs. But that one happened to be near, and Judith understood.

"Lalla's tonee? What yer can see to like in the old thing I can't think; but a rajah himself would give yer all the tonees in his palace if he could but see yer ask" (she said arst though) "for 'em like that. Here, take yer tonee, chick! Lalla loves yer." She got up out of her chair as she spoke and gave the boy an ivory brooch off the dressing-table. It was of Indian workmanship, and represented an elephant—the only ornament of any kind that Judith Foresight had ever been known to wear. She never wore it now; she would never wear it again in all probability, for the sharp steel pin behind it had been wrenched off when little Jim had first taken a fancy to the miniature animal, which, for reasons totally unknown, he called a tonee.

His fingers clutched his treasure and held it tight, and his cheeks and chin dimpled into smiles as he looked at it with his round eyes of nondescript colour, and talked to it in the language all his own.

"Ah, when I see your sweet face look like that," cried Judith Foresight, kissing the silky flax upon the boy's bent head, "I seem to see your daddee once again, only small like. He is the big, brave man that you and I was talking of just now, my baby bright—the sort the pretty soldiers likes to follow, and the Queen loves, when she pins the bits of silver on to 'em in a line with the second button from the top, just a little this-ways from the centre of the left breast—I knows the place right well. Them's the sort, honey!—with hearts like lions' hearts, but all the time as tender—and, God help him! sometimes as innocent—as your own."

"Tonee, Lalla, tonee! 'Ook, Lalla, tonee. Oh! tonee—de-ar—ton-nee!"

"And many's the time I've seen him creep on tiptoe into yer room o' nights, baby, and bend over yer wee face; and now, when he comes back, you'll be no longer weeny as yer was, but he's got to see yer walk and hear"—it is a pity, perhaps, that she said 'ear—"yer talk. And he's got to learn from yer that dogs is bow-wows, cats is minnies, birds tweets, ducks quack-quars, an' all sorts o' gibberish that he never learned before, but for all that will soon know a mighty lot about, I'll warrant."

"Baby by-by, Lalla; by-by-by-ee-ee."

The ivory elephant had fallen to the ground; the little face turned wearily to Judith's breast; the little arms wandered round about her neck; the tiny hands toyed for a few idle moments with the buttons of her dress, then fell listlessly down, down. The flaxen head drooped; the heavy eyelids closed; the babbling voice cooed for a time in unison with the droning lullaby that soothed the busy little mind into forgetfulness, and then was still. The child, in all the trustfulness of its childhood—in the fearlessness of perfect ignorance, which knows neither sin nor harm nor sorrow—fell fast asleep in the arms of the adamantine-looking woman.

She bent her head over that of the sleeping boy, and gently—as gently as a leaf falls to the ground on a summer day—dropped a kiss upon his upturned face. Then, crooning all the time, she carried him across the room and laid him on her bed.

There was a noise upon the stair outside, and with her finger on her lip, she turned towards the opening door and said "S-s-h-h!" rather peremptorily to her mistress.

"All right, all right, I can see he's asleep; you need not s-s-h-h me like that. Here, send one of the men with this note to Mr. Rook, and tell him to wait for an answer."

Judith frowned like a thunder-cloud as she departed on her errand, but she said nothing, not even "Yes, m'm."

He had returned at last, and she had sent a little note asking him to tiffen. Weeks had passed since she had received Jim's last letter. He was sulking, she supposed. Very good. That need not interfere with her enjoyment; and now that Bertie was back——

The child upon the bed turned in his sleep and lay with his face towards her.

"Upon my word," said Lucy aloud to herself, "I positively love Bertie."

The baby's eyes were still shut, but he fidgeted about on the bed and muttered to himself something that sounded like "tonee, tonee."

"S-s-h-h!" said Lucy, "go to sleep and don't knock about like that. Dear me, what a time Judith is"

Instead of doing as he was told like an obedient boy, little Jim opened his eyes and stared at her. "Tonee, Lalla, tonee," he said.

"S-s-h-h!" said Lucy again, and she patted him. This, instead of soothing him, woke him outright. He struggled up on to his knees, and looking at Lucy, began to cry dismally. She picked him up and set him on her knee. Then he lifted up his voice and fairly yelled.

"Oh! bub, bub," he said, as well as his choking

voice would let him; "oh, Lalla, Lalla, tonee, to-n-ee-ee!"—and he writhed and wriggled on Lucy's lap, and refused to be comforted.

"I don't know what you mean by tonee, you naughty little boy; be quiet, do! Well, then, if you will go, go;" and she set him on his legs upon the floor.

Crying all the way, he staggered across the floor and made for the door. After many swerving divergences out of his true course and much perilous oscillation of his small person, he gained the door without a fall, and holding on to it for support, cried, "Tonee, tonee; oh, bub, bub, Lalla," with a whole world of woe in every syllable and an ocean of distress in every sob.

But relief was close at hand. A step sounded on the stair outside, the door opened, and Judith snatched him up in her arms and covered his face with kisses.

"What is it, baby boy?"

"Tonee, Lalla, tonee," he moaned, only half comforted. His ideas this time were perfectly collected, and his purpose fixed.

Judith looked about on the floor for the elephant brooch; found it under the chair where it had fallen, and gave it to him. His cries ceased; he held his "tonee" tightly in his hand, and in ten minutes was sound asleep again in Judith's arms.

Lucy had watched the various phases of the whole performance with some interest.

"How did you know he wanted that?" she asked, indicating the brooch.

"I knows heverythink he wants," said Judith, with a disdainful sniff.

"But how?"

"By watchin' of him, by bein' with him night an' day, day an' night; by teachin' him as well as I can—I never had but one child o' me own, and he died—an' by learnin' of him, too. Children ain't to be understood by every now and then just a-lookin' at 'em; they're wiser than we thinks for, an' they takes a deal o' knowin'."

This was the rude way in which Judith sometimes addressed her mistress, leaving out all her usual "m'ms," and filling their rightful places with frowns. Lucy had often scolded her elderly handmaiden for the brusqueness of her manner, and on one memorable occasion had threatened her with dismissal. the scoldings had been barren of result; and as to the threat, Judith had simply smiled at it, saying she was under "the Capting's orders" as commanding officer and paymaster in one. Judith was one of Jim's hobbies, and Lucy knew that it was of little use writing to him complaining of her conduct. She had tried the effect of doing so more than once, and as she never got any redress, was forced to fight her own battles with indifferent success, put up with affronts, or hotly resent them, only to be laughed at, as sometimes happened, and stomach many indignities, all for the sake of a pig-headed husband's foolish whim. Not that she really wanted Judith to go- Mrs. Foresight was a valuable woman in many ways, and one not easily replaced—but she wished her to know her position. With this object in view, she had solicited Jim's assistance, quarrelled repeatedly with Judith herself, and, latterly, treated her with silent contempt

when she was inclined to be impertinent. On the present occasion she swept from the room with haughty indifference to her last remark.

Within an hour her note to Mr. Rook was answered by that gentleman in person. They had a delightful little tiffen together, and then rode down to the gymkhana and watched the races side by side, with every one looking at them. Lucy was supremely happy, and conscious of looking her very best.

Mrs. Lovejoy came up to her smiling, and Lucy wondered what unpleasantness was in store for her behind that smile.

"Glad to see you back, Mr. Rook," said charming little Mrs. Lovejoy "and how is your husband, Mrs. Vraille?"

"Oh, all right," said Lucy,

Mrs. Lovejoy opened her eyes a little as if in surprise, and said, "So glad to hear it—some one told me just now he was very ill; but of course you ought to know. Charming day, is it not?" and away she fluttered.

"Of all the spiteful little painted things I ever came across," said Lucy, as she and Bertie rode homewards through the pines and rhododendrons, "that Mrs. Lovejoy is the spitefullest and most painted."

Mr. Rook laughed.

"Never mind her, Lucy," he said; "you can afford to forgive a little spite, and her jealousy is as natural as—well, her complexion is not. Look! there's a sunset for you."

It was a gorgeous evening. The Himalayas were bathed in a flood of gold. Above and below the pine-

tops bowed and swayed in the gentle air, and the little waterfalls that tumbled over the mossy rocks and sparkled amid the bracken soothed the senses with their whispering plash. Under the leafy heights of classic Jakkho they drew rein to admire the view. It could not but appeal to the least observant of nature's beauties. Range after range of purple mountain, bank upon bank of fleecy cloud, stretched before them out to the horizon, and there the perpetual snows drew a long white line across the background of the picture.

"It's lovely," said Lucy, with a long-drawn sigh. "I should so like to see the snows quite close."

"Would you? You shall. The very thing. We'll make up a party and go. How lucky you thought of it! We will have a ten-days' picnic in Elysium—the last and best picnic of the season, the last before I leave—leave for good, you know, Lucy dearest."

They talked over the project as they rode home—the home, that is, that Jim had provided for Lucy and paid the rent of through the bank. They discussed it in earnest that evening and for the next ten days. At the end of a fortnight it was all settled, merry little party and all. Lucy was delighted.

Nothing occurred to mar her prospective pleasure, until the day before that settled on for the start. Then, at last, she received a letter from Jim. It was brusque and short; he was coming home, he said, on sick leave. It was too bad. But as she reflected that the picnic would in all probability be over before he could arrive—he mentioned no date—she decided that his letter should not spoil her pleasure and that of other people. She stuffed it into the drawer VOL. I.

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where the rest were, and said nothing about it to any one.

There was a great deal of packing to be done, but as most of it had fallen to Judith's share, that good lady, tough as she was, was not sorry to see the cavalcade depart. She was, moreover, glad of an opportunity to overhaul little Jim's wardrobe, which had fallen into a state that had caused many a battle royal between herself and her mistress. With scissors and needle and a large roll of calico, she set herself to work, and a week of comparative rest and absolute peace slipped away. But on the afternoon of the eighth day, a telegram, addressed to Mrs. Vraille, caused her great disquietude. Not knowing where her mistress was, further than that she was on a roving tour in the interior, she despatched a syce with the telegram, telling him to run with it along the road toward the snow mountains as fast as his legs could carry him, and not to stop until he had delivered it into the mem-sahib's own hands.

The syce grinned and departed, running like a madman—until he was out of sight.

But out of sight was not out of mind so far as Judith was concerned. That telegram weighed upon her spirits, and she was inclined to be melancholy in her discourse with little Jim. A heavy day had passed—and another—and she had put him to bed.

"Ah! baby boy," she said as she sat beside his little cot, working at an insignificant-looking bit of a shirt, "if you only knew, if he only knew—daddee, as yer will call him, though I've told yer times and times it's dadda. You sleep there in yer foolish little

ignorance, an' he, maybe, is fightin' still, or lyin' sick in hospital—if there be sich things as hospitals in them foreign parts—or dead, for all they know or care. Or maybe he'll soon be comin' home; an' Lalla, as yer calls her, bless yer! don't know now whether she be glad or sorry."

No servant in the house could tread like that! None of them wore boots, and those were heavy boots! Who was it?

Judith was no coward, but when the door opened and a grey-haired, black-bearded man, dressed in very shabby yellow clothing, walked into the room, she could not find her voice to ask him what he wanted.

"Is no one about? Am I to break into my own house as if I were a thief? Where's Lucy—Mrs. Vraille, I mean? What, Judith, don't you know me?"

"Lawks-a-mercy, no, sir, I did not! Oh, master, how you've changed!"

CHAPTER XI.

HOME.

Changed? Yes, he was changed! A month or two of intermittent fever changes most men. It makes them shaky in the legs, stiff in the joints, hollow-eyed and cheeked, sallow-complexioned; it rarely leaves them without carrying off with it all superfluous flesh, and sometimes gives them a stoop in the shoulders, until they get their lost strength back again. Yes, Jim was certainly changed.

"No one came to meet me," he said. "I was disappointed. All the day through I had looked forward—I had expected, I mean, to be met, as I had sent a telegram. I wanted a pony to ride, and had to borrow one. I did not even know the way, you see. But it doesn't matter."

Judith did not answer, and he did not seem to expect an answer; his eyes had wandered to the bed, and walking across the room, he stood beside it, looking at the sleeping child.

For a time, that seemed to Judith interminably long, he stood there without speaking. At last he looked up and whispered softly, "Is this the little bit of a thing I left behind? Why, Judith, he has grown out of all knowledge"

"Yes, sir, he be growed!" said Judith, in a foolish,

constrained sort of way, as if she were feeling the whole situation exceedingly uncomfortable.

- "When'll he wake up?" whispered Jim.
- "Not till to-morrow, I hopes, sir."
- "Oh, not till to-morrow, won't he? Walk about a bit and talk now, can he? Good boy, is he?"
- "Lor, sir, yes; very good boy indeed!" said Judith, promptly; "but yer see, sir, yer musn't wake him up by talkin'."
- "No, no, of course not," said Jim; "I'll go away now. Good-night, little chap—see you to-morrow!" He stole across the room on tip-toe, stepping high and looking very absurd in his endeavours to move noiselessly. When he had reached the door, he turned and beckoned to Judith. "Where shall I find Mrs. Vraille?" he whispered. "I saw no one about the place when I came in."

"She's out," said Judith; "but if you go down to the drawin'-room and wait for five minutes, I'll get yer somethin' to eat. You must want it bad; you look so worn and tired like."

He descended the stairs, making as little noise as possible, found his way back to the drawing-room, through which he had already passed in his search about the house, and flung himself upon a sofa, for he was, as he muttered to himself, "dead beat!"

He had travelled a hundred miles in a dhoolie, scarcely knowing how the days went; he had been shaken to pieces in tongas and gharries; he had spent thirty hours in the train, thinking it a haven of luxury, although the thermometer had averaged some ninety-five degrees the whole time. He had lost nearly

the whole of his kit through moth and rust and fish insect and red ant—through the carelessness of others and his own helplessness—and was wearing the kharkee clothing that had been sweated through and through a thousand times, with a shabby old shooting-coat thrown over it. He had travelled eighty miles that day; foot by foot he had risen out of the sweltering heat into the delicious atmosphere of the hills; he had galloped homeward along the Mall on a borrowed pony—only to find that she was out. He looked about him and saw that the room he was lying in was tasteful in the extreme; and yet he was ungrateful enough to feel disappointed.

Judith put her head in at the door. "Yer bearer's come," she said, "with some o' yer things. If yer'll come along o' me, l'll show yer yer room. By the time yer ready for dinner, it'll be ready for you; leastways somethin' 'll be ready, for there ain't much in the house."

Mrs. Foresight was usually a silent woman, as Jim very well remembered, and he was rather surprised at her present volubility. She kept up a running fire of comment and small-talk as he followed her across the hall, and gave him no opportunity of making any remarks on his own account. But, by dint of "speaking through her," he at last managed to squeeze in the questions he was most anxious to put.

"Where's your mistress? How long has she been

out? When do you expect her back?"

"There, that's the door, sir," said Judith, taking not the slightest notice; "I've put yer clean towels an'

soap an' 'ot water, an' if yer wants anythin', yer've only got to shout, as I shall be in here seein' to yer dinner."

All this struck Jim as rather strange. Lucy had often complained to him of Judith's rudeness, and he began to think that she had just cause of complaint. But there was that in Judith's demeanour that seemed to indicate that his arrival was totally unexpected. Moreover, there were no servants about the house; no signs of preparation for him, much less of welcome. Where could Lucy be? It was too late for any afternoon entertainment, too early for an evening one, unless it were a dinner-party; and surely she would not have dined out on the very evening of his return without leaving some sort of message. She had gone to meet him, and had missed him in the dark—that was it, probably.

In the dining-room he found a cold collation awaiting his attentions, and attacked it with vigour. Then he took a good pull at a brandy-and-soda, and felt altogether happier. But all this time he had been waiting upon himself; and just as he was beginning to vow vengeance on Lucy's khitmatgars, Judith appeared with a couple of poached eggs.

"Why are you bringing in those things yourself?" he asked. "Where are the servants?"

"They are gone with mistress—that's the truth. I did not want to bother yer with a lot o' talk directly yer come home, but Mrs. Vraille's gone on an expedition inter the interior, and took most o' the servants with her; that's how it is."

[&]quot;Gone on an expedition? With whom?"

- "Mrs. Palmira, most like, though I did not see her; and Mrs. Lovejoy was of the party."
 - "How long have they been gone?"
 - "About a week."
- "Then she ought to have had my letter before she started?"

Judith did not answer.

- "And the telegram?"
- "I sent that on, sir."
- "Oh," said Jim, dreamily, "you sent that on? When do you expect Mrs. Vraille back?"
- "To-morrow or next day," said Judith, mendaciously, for she had no grounds for making such an assertion.
- "Oh, that's it, then," he said, with an air of relief, helping himself to a poached egg; "she thought she would be back in time—any way the telegram will fetch her back to-morrow or next day. You sent it by a runner, I suppose?"
 - "Yes, sir, the quickest runner in the stable."
- "Do you mean you gave it to a syce to take? Humph! Well, it doesn't matter. Tell me, Judith, has Mrs. Vraille been well and strong all the time I've been away?"

Judith hastened to reassure him. "Oh, yes, sir, perfectly well, never had a day's sickness that I knows on." Somehow her answer did not seem to have the effect intended. He sighed rather wearily, and then began talking about the child. She gave him all the information he required, which took a considerable time, and then left him, "to see," as she said, "after the airin' o' the sheets."

He strolled back into the drawing-room, feeling

lonely in his own house, and when his bearer had brought him a pair of slippers, flung himself upon the sofa again, and lighted a pipe. A pipe! A pipe had not desecrated that sanctum since Lucy had called it a boudoir, though many a cigarette had been consumed amid its dainty etceteras by admirers of its taste and elegance.

The fumes from his pipe rose up and up; he watched them idly, moving neither hand nor foot. He was dog-tired. He had come a long, long way to reach his home, and now that he had reached it there was not a soul but this hard-faced servant to welcome him-even his child was sound asleep. When he had left the camp, Dr. Dick had pulled aside the curtain of his dhoolie and bade him God-speed. "You'll do well enough now, old fellow," he had said-Jim could recall every word—" and a very little home-nursing will set you on your legs again." Others beside Dr. Dick had come to bid him good-bye, for he had been a sort of celebrity in the camp, because of the convoy business. Did he wish himself back again, after allback in that infernal hospital among the flies, where day after day he had lain in a sort of stupor, listening to their incessant buzz, and where night after night he had imagined his body to be a log of wood which it was his bounden duty to roll over with his hands, but could not? No; of course he wished no such thing! And yet Dr. Dick had been very kind, as kind-yes, he supposed the simile was a good one, since everybody used it—as kind as a woman. "I went full of ambition --full of ambition," he mused, speaking to himself as there was no one else to talk to; and he felt talkatively inclined. "My ambition has been more than fulfilled, and now I have come back. Ah, Lucy darling, little did I think when I wrote you that long letter of complaint what the next four-and-twenty hours had in store for me! Poor old Dare! I wish now I had not abused him so much. It was unkind of Dick to say that the worst turn he ever did me was to die just—well, well, he's gone, and it can't be helped. How Dick did hate him! So did I once, and I'm sorry."

His pipe went out, and he got up to knock the ashes into the fire-place before refilling it. On the mantel-piece he saw a photograph of himself taken in England. It stood in front of a looking-glass. From the face in the little gilt frame to that reflected in the mirror his eyes wandered to and fro.

"Well!" he said at last, "I need not be surprised that Judith did not recognise me at first." Then he looked at the photographs of the other people who ornamented the mantelpiece. Herbert Rook in a frockcoat; Herbert Rook in a shooting-jacket. "Bah! I never cared for that chap!" he said, as he turned his back upon the fire-place. Herbert Rook looked at him from a small work-table. Then, as his eyes roamed round the room, they fell upon the handsome face in two or three other places. "A gallery of him," said Jim, and he started on a tour of inspection.

Upon every table, what-not, bracket, shelf, were photographs, nearly all of them of Lucy. She had, it appeared to Jim, been taken in every conceivable pose, and in every imaginable costume. He gazed long and earnestly at each, trying to make up his mind which picture represented the beautiful features to their

fullest advantage, and fancied that that in which she and Herbert Rook had been taken together in ridingdress had caught her most charming expression.

Thus passed James Vraille's first evening at home; and only too glad of the excuse of having nothing to do, he went to bed.

He slept late, and did not breakfast until nearly ten o'clock. That meal disposed of, he had thoughts of visiting the nursery; but not liking to obtrude himself on Judith's domain, drew a chair into the verandah and sat looking at the misty mountains as he smoked his pipe. He could see the tonga-road winding away into the distance, and was trying to follow its intricacies, when the noise of pattering feet on the board flooring of the verandah made him turn his head.

Near the corner of the house stood a little figure, something little more than a foot and a half high.

"Hallo, little chap; come here and let's have a look at you!"

He leant forward and held out his arms.

Little Jim did not budge; his round eyes stared at the bearded man unblinkingly, fixed and steadfast; his small body swayed unsteadily, and one finger pulled down the corner of his mouth.

"Can't you walk, little chap—only stand? Will you be frightened if I come and fetch you?"

A hoarse voice from behind the angle of the house whispered—" Say daddee, baby; say it quick for Lalla."

Vraille probably thought it good policy not to notice this stage direction from the prompter, and as if unconscious of it, continued his persuasions, but without making any visible impression. Then a thought struck him, and taking a large silver watch from his pocket, he touched the spring and opened the back. This performance he repeated two or three times, blowing on the watch so as to make it appear that that was the sesame of the phenomenon. The experiment told; the attraction was irresistible; and by slow and very unsteady degrees little Jim approached nearer and nearer, Vraille going on with the performance as if his life depended on it.

When the boy had arrived at measurable distance, Jim held out the watch to him and said, "Blow!"

Puffing out his cheeks as he had seen Jim do, the boy blew. *Mirabile dictu!* The watch opened. His face expanded; his eyes dilated; he laughed a fat little laugh, and said—"'Gain."

"Again, I suppose you mean. Come on, then. Here it goes again. Now—blow!"

Pouff! The same result. The same chuckle.

"Now come and sit on my knee and try. Come on, my man, I would not hurt a hair of your head for ten thousand pounds!"

The child looked up into his face with that intense expression of profound thought that lends childhood the momentary air of age, and gives its complete ignorance the transitory appearance of unutterable sagacity. Then, in a flash, it was all gone. The child was a child again; the child's face smiled, and the child's voice suddenly exclaimed—

"Daddee!"

"My boy-my little chap!"

The victory was won—the victory that so few know

how to set about to win—so easy for some, yet so very hard for others.

Jim, as he watched the cherub mouth blowing at the watch, felt a lump rise in his throat. Why was it that the sight of the boy made him feel sad, when all the time it was filling him with happiness? As he felt the feather-weight upon his knee, he longed to hug it to his heart, but dared not for fear of frightening the boy—his boy—his own son. As he felt the tiny fingers cling tightly to one of his own, a thrill shot through his frame—such as he had never before experienced in his whole life.

Judith's rugged countenance presently appeared from behind the house-corner, and a lesson in experimental philosophy occupied Jim's attention for the next half-hour. The watch was opened and re-opened a thousand times. It was dropped and picked up again; it was listened to in silence, pushed away in petulance; it was handled with the delicate yet awkward touch of little Jim's small fingers; it was sucked, and very probably seriously damaged—but what did that matter? Vraille listened to the unintelligible language of his child, and strove to understand it as diligently as in former days he had striven to master the Hindustani grammar.

"I shall know better what he means a week hence," he said to Judith.

"Lor, sir, he can tell that as well as you or me. I knowed he'd come to yer of his own accord, if let alone. Children knows what's what—though 'taint my place to say so—better than most grow'd folk."

"I never thought, you know," said Jim, looking up

with something of his son's simplicity in his smile, "that I cared for babies. When I was a young fellow, Judith, I never thought about anything but pleasure—pleasure—pleasure. I never found it—upon my soul I don't believe I ever found it real, you know, until to-day. The idea of babies is associated in a man's mind with sickness and crying and dribbling; but this little chap is clean and healthy-looking, and isn't sick, and smells nice, and never cries. Hallo!"

Not too fast James Vraille; you have a lot to learn yet! The child's nether lip had sunk, displaying only very few teeth; the happy face was puckered into many distressful wrinkles; the wide-open eyes had closed, and the cheerful voice of a moment ago was giving forth a series of the most dismal wails. Jim was quite unable to account for this sudden manifestation of grief, and looked perplexedly at Judith; but Judith, without assigning any cause for it, snatched the boy up in his arms, and carried him off into the house with many mumbled expressions of endearment.

Vraille's occupation for the time was gone, and leaving word where he was to be found should Lucy return while he was out, he sallied forth to the Headquarter Office to report himself and make sundry inquiries concerning his leave. The staff official at the office greeted him cordially.

"Let me congratulate you on your promotion to a home station, Vraille," he said, "and on other matters that have reached us—unofficially as yet. There was some hitch about the recommendation, I hear; but no doubt it will come in time?"

Instead of answering the implied question, Major

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Vraille blushed. He knew what the hitch was; he knew, moreover, that it was a very serious hitch, one that destroys many hopes, defeats many objects, and upsets many calculations—death; and so he stammered out his thanks for the other's congratulations, applied for a few weeks' leave pending his embarkation for England, and took his departure.

As he strolled along the Mall, he noticed that many nicely-dressed people stared at him, some of them even whispering as he passed, and turning to stare after him. He was aware that his appearance was not all that might be desired, and on his way to the Club called at a tailor's to order a suit of clothes. The tailor, who was also a dressmaker, seemed very pleased to see him, and after taking his measure, mentioned a small outstanding account of Mrs. Vraille's.

"Well, send it in," said Jim.

"Very good, sir, I will; I will address it to you, if you will allow me."

"As you please," Jim replied, wondering what the

Finding some acquaintances at the Club, he stayed there to lunch, registered his name for election, and strolled home again. But Lucy had not returned; and after the passage of a few compliments between himself and little Jim, he went back to the Club again and tried to read the papers; but he felt lonely and ill at ease—he could settle to nothing until his wife returned. He longed to see her. Sick of movement as he was, and much as he wanted rest, he wandered about and could not rest. His heart was full, and aching to be relieved of its long-borne burden; his tongue

itched to tell her of his successes; his very arms seemed useless until they had held her in their embrace. He could find no peace, and rather than spend his time alone he spent it at the Club.

But it was not all dreariness. The next morning, after breakfast, little Jim, with his hair brushed and in a clean pinafore, made his appearance, and the silver watch was again produced. The old performance was repeated several times with great effect; but it palled at last, and the watch was put away—"to by-by," as little Jim said.

Then the conversation took several jumps and turns in all kinds of unexpected directions, until it finally settled down more or less steadily to the subject of natural history. The child lectured, the man took notes—mental ones. Little Jim, seated on big Jim's knee, with an open book on the subject before him, proceeded to demonstrate his remarks with a fat inch-and-a-quarter fore-finger, while his pupil listened attentively.

He bubbled and spluttered and cooed and crowed; he struggled with words that would not come, and passed on to others, repeating a few favourites many dozen times before he could make up his mind to part with them. He turned over the pages of the book furiously in his search for one particularly graphic illustration of, an ass which occupied more of his admiration and affection than any other picture in the collection—a predilection visibly accentuated by dirty finger marks. When he had found the donkey, he gloated over him, saying "gonkey—de-ar—gonkey," over and over again in many different tones of voice; and when the "gonkey's" charms failed—always

suddenly—to attract, he turned over a dozen pages at once, and called Vraille's attention to a bow-wow, or a baa, or a boo, or quack-quar, but invariably returned again—impulsively, and with all the eagerness of a perfectly novel idea—to his old friend the gonkey.

Now this part of Jim's lesson was simple enough; but when he looked into the child's eager little face, he could read there the truth of Mrs. Foresight's oftrepeated remark, that "children took a deal o'knowin'." There was much in that busy little brain that he knew nothing of, and perhaps, study as he might, would never know. There was no margin in that little mind; it was filled full of the one idea that happened to be occupying it for the second. Then that idea was banished, utterly banished by another. Like a flash of light, the "gonkey" in the book was wholly displaced by a "gickey-bird" in the air. (In the picture-book the same animal was a "tweet"—why was that?) And each idea, with all its attributes, was summed up in a single word; each thought, it seemed, expressed in some quaint sound. But then, when Jim had made some foolish remark or other, an air of deep abstraction settled on the baby face, and the man, with all his knowledge, felt that it was beyond mortal power to determine the silent workings of the baby mind at that given moment.

"Are you so simple, so pure, that you can commune with the angels, my little chap?" Vraille whispered in the boy's ear during one of these fits of mental abstraction.

The child laughed. The breath of the whisper had tickled his cheek. It was funny. "'Gain," he said.

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"I would do it again lots of times, my boy, my baby boy; but Judith says you must go to sleep now for a bit."

"Lalla!"

"Yes, Lalla. Good-bye, little chap. Daddee 'll play with the boy again to-morrow." (He was getting quite proficient.)

But on the morrow, when the morning talk was over, and the child asleep, and Lucy still not come, his stock of patience suddenly gave out. "There is a pony in the stable," he said to Judith, "and if Mrs. Vraille has not returned within the next two hours, I'm off to meet her."

"No, sir, don't do that," said Judith with much more animation than was usual with her; "yer wants rest, if ever mortal did, and yer'd much better stay quiet—now, do 'ee, sir, another day or two."

"I can't stay quiet—I can't rest. No, I'll go."

Better for him had he taken Judith's advice; but he was obstinate and would not. The bracing air of the hills and the healthy tonics administered by little Jim had made a new man of him, and when he was fairly on the road he congratulated himself upon the step he had taken. Lucy was with a party, but perhaps she had left it to ride on when she received his telegram, and she must have received it days ago. It was no distance to travel, alone even, and she had plenty of servants with her. Perhaps she had induced one of the party, or even the whole of it, to hurry forward with her, but he hoped she was alone. She would surely be alone. Any bend in the road might bring them face to face, any moment they might meet—and what a scene

for their meeting! Nothing was wanting to complete its romance. But the day was advancing, and as yet they had not met.

Late in the evening he reached the end of the first stage. She was not at the dâk-bungalow, as he had hoped she might be; but news of her was: Judith's messenger (one of his old syces) greeted him with a salaam and the intelligence that he had left the memsahib some twenty miles further on the day before.

In case of a contingency such as this, Vraille had brought with him a light equipment in a saddle-bag; and so he spent the night alone at the dâk-bungalow just as drearily as he would have done had he remained at home another day—and far more uncomfortably. However, it was the last of his solitude, and early the next morning he started off, his hopes higher, and his heart lighter, than they had been since his return.

But as he rode on and on his hopes sank, his heart became heavier, with each succeeding mile. The stage was a short one, usually coupled with the last by the homeward bound. By starting moderately early she could easily have reached home in the one day; and yet they had not met. What could have happened to detain her?

Pressing his pony forward as quickly as possible, with his anxiety increasing every minute, he reached the next dâk-bungalow sooner than he expected. Not a sign of her.

He flung himself off his pony and questioned the khansamah waiting in the doorway to receive him in a way that made that worthy Mahometan press his hands together before his face and call Vraille "Defender of the poor" and "Father of the afflicted" a dozen times before being able to find any more sensible remark to make.

He answered at last. The sahib people were his patrons; they had slept and breakfasted under his humble roof; they had given the order for tiffen; they were eating the air among the mountains.

Vraille uttered a curse and strode away.

He searched through glen and dale and nook, high and low, on this side and on that; he clambered up one path and down another, he wandered along the banks of an enticing stream, he pushed aside the branches of a delightful wood, and stopped. Voices, though he could see nothing. Three strides further on and he reached the brow of a leafy hill, and looked down, only for a second or two. But in that second or two he had seen and heard enough.

"You damned villain!"

Mr. Herbert Rook picked himself up and rushed at his assailant, only to fall a second time with the blood streaming from his mouth.

James Vraille, with heaving breast and the eyes of a madman, turned to his wife, and in a short, quick breath told her to go on before him to the house.

And so, at last, they met.

"The ten minutes are up. Your jampan has gone on. Your horse is waiting. Come."

"B-ut—b-ut—I—haven't—packed," sobbed Lucy.

"Packed! Do you think I intend to wait while you pack—now. Come."

"But I must-"

"Come, I say," thundered Vraille ferociously. "I will not speak again."

She was frightened into submission, too frightened to speak another word. In five minutes more she was in the saddle riding beside a sullen, silent brute of a man. For a time her sobs were the only sounds that broke the silence; but even they ceased at last, and still he did not speak. Mile after mile of this continued wretchedness, unbroken by a single word, and then a halt.

"You will lunch here, and then go on in your jampan," he said, slinging himself awkwardly out of his saddle, and coming to her side to help her to dismount.

"Jim," she exclaimed, looking down at him, "you look positively horrible. Oh, why did you come poking and prying about?"

"Ah! why indeed! But we have no time to waste. Dismount, please. Go in, now, and eat. I will wait here."

In less than half an bour they were on the road again, with their chances of conversation considerably reduced. Rarely was the road wide enough to admit of the jampan and the pony travelling side by side, and in such places where it was, Vraille took no advantage of the opportunity, but kept behind. A long, wretched, silent journey. The day waned, the sun sank, the darkness of night enveloped them; and when they had reached the Mall at last, Lucy turned and asked him suddenly if he were dumb.

He made no answer, but brought his pony alongside her jampan. "Have you nothing to say?" she asked.

"Nothing yet," he answered.

And so they reached their home. Lucy hurried into the house, and Jim, calling a couple of her jampanees to help him, scrambled out of the saddle on to the ground as best he could. His legs were cramped and stiff; the three stages had been more than enough to overtax his strength. When the natives had disappeared in the darkness, he followed his wife into the house, and, making his way to the drawing-room, dropped into a chair

"Now," said Lucy, "perhaps you will have the kindness to speak."

"To-morrow," he said.

"No, now! I have had time to think. You have created an awful scandal. What are you going to do?"

"I'll tell you that to-morrow. I do not wish to say

anything now-I am not fit."

"Oh, you are beginning to repent a little! I thought you would. When all is said and done you have made a mountain out of a mole-hill, and you had no right to

go and strike a man in that cowardly---"

"Silence!" cried Vraille, springing to his feet. "I will not listen to you. That word might have stung me once, but I care nothing for it now. Go to your room and leave me, before I say anything more. Lucy—" and he caught her by the wrist as she was about to answer—" if you have one grain of sense in all your despicable folly, leave me now, and don't say another word to me to-night. Go!"

She shrank back from him; his face twitched, his eyes glared, his hand hurt her wrist. She had always

dreaded his return, but she had never expected to meet a madman whose presence filled her with terror and repulsion, as his did now. Readily she hurried from the room, and sent for Judith to attend to her wants.

But Judith before answering her summons came into the drawing-room. She walked up to the man lying rather than sitting in the arm-chair by the fireplace, and, touching him softly on the arm, whispered, "Is there anything I can bring you, sir?"

He neither looked at her nor moved, but answered roughly, "Yes, fetch me a brandy and soda."

Judith, whose wooden face rarely expressed emotion, looked surprised; but she did as he bade her, and, placing a small table beside him, set the glass upon it. He raised it to his lips, drained it to the last drop, and set it down again.

"Just tell your mistress," he said, getting up and stretching his arms wearily, "that I am going straight to bed, as I am tired."

He was indeed tired—so tired that a long night's rest would have done him all the good in the world, as the saying is, and yet so tired that he could not sleep. His limbs ached and his skin was hot; he thought that perhaps a return of the fever was keeping him awake, especially as that old sensation of being a log of wood was creeping over him. But he was so tired that, in spite of will and sense of imperative duty, his hands refused to do their office and roll his body over—so tired that his mind could not fix itself upon the work, but wandered away to other things. Some one was breathing in the room; he could hear the noise faintly in a far-off corner; but it came nearer and nearer,

louder and louder, until the harsh, stertorous gasps were in his very ear, and the breath upon his cheek. With an effort he moved, and the sound ceased. The movement called his attention to his hands and feet; they were swelling, swelling to a gigantic size, and so rapidly increasing in weight that they felt like leaden cannon-balls; and everything they touched was huge in proportion; the threads in the sheets were ropes, the blankets iron weights, the wool upon them bayonets. He was being crushed and suffocated, and he started up, flinging off the bed-clothes.

"Oh, this will never do," he cried, jumping out of bed and pulling aside the window-blind.

It was early morning, and a pearly grey mist hung over the mountains.

"She is only foolish, only vain and frivolous, and her vanity and folly have been played upon by that blackguard. But there is an end of all trust and confidence—the better parts of love. I wonder if she is asleep."

He threw a dressing-gown over his shoulders, and crept—like a thief, as he had said to Judith—through the silent house and into his wife's room. She was asleep—peacefully asleep.

"Ah! beautiful—too beautiful to be anything but good. Yet, Lucy, I wish you were not beautiful. Would that your face were plain, ugly even! But it is lovely, very lovely! No, I will not kiss it."

He stole back to his bed again, and slept.

The khansamah salaamed low to his master as he entered the breakfast-room. The sahib was rested? His health good? The mem-sahib was breakfasting in her own room; her excellency was probably fatigued.

Would the sahib drink tea, or would he prefer coffee? Both were at his excellency's disposal.

The man was Vraille's old retainer; the unctuous words were familiar; the scene might have been enacted in the handsome bungalow of those gay times of prosperity in the plains. The comfortable little room, the one chair set at the table, the one place laid, were all the same as when Judith had brought him the poached eggs on the night of his return home. But it was not even yesterday. It was to-day.

A pile of letters lay beside his plate. He read them as he ate, but they seemed to spoil his appetite somewhat. He went on reading them as he sat in the verandah afterwards, smoking his pipe; and as he was picking them up one by one from his lap, running his eye over them for the twentieth time, and putting them back in their envelopes, a pair of pattering feet on the board flooring attracted his attention, and a shy little voice said "Daddee?" with a question in it.

"Judith, are you there?"

"Yes, sir," and she appeared from behind the house-corner.

"Take him away, Judith; take him away. I can't play with him this morning."

The child did not recognise the voice; it was that of a strange man, so he toddled back to Judith as fast as his legs would carry him, and clung to the skirts of her dress.

He watched them go, and sent no kind word after them; but, thrusting his letters into his pocket, muttered to himself: "I'm not fit to go near him. Now—yes, as well now as later."

- "Lucy," he said, tapping at her door.
- "Well, what is it?"
- "May I come in?"
- "Yes, if you like."

He turned the handle and went in. He had done better had he remained outside. But James Vraille, who proverbially said the wrong thing at the wrong time, with nothing but his convictions to help him, blundered on, and was bound to make as many mistakes as were possible under the circumstances. Such men deserve, of course, to go to the wall—and they usually do.

He found her lying comfortably propped up with pillows on a sofa, and beside her was a small table, on which was laid out a pretty little breakfast service. Apparently she was in an advanced stage of toilet, for her hair was dressed as if for the day, and she wore an exceedingly becoming morning robe with ruffles of lace about the neck. Never had Jim seen her look more beautiful than she did then.

She set down her coffee-cup as he advanced and stared at him.

"I have come to have a talk with you, Lucy," he said, seating himself beside the table.

"Oh, I thought you were not going to talk to me any more. Well, go on." Instinct told her that he had come to her with submission. Now was her opportunity; he had frightened her nearly out of her senses the night before, but he had calmed down considerably, and she would make him repent his brutality.

"It is difficult to know how to begin if you meet

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me like that, Lucy; but what I wish to say is, that I have come to you with my forgiveness if you will but express one little word of regret."

He paused, but she made no reply.

"Say you were carried away for the moment, and confess to me everything that went before—just to reassure me. Say your vanity succumbed to that cad's flattery—say that there is no real harm done—say that what happened yesterday was only the folly of an impulse—that you regret it—that we can begin life anew from to-day—say you are sorry—say anything——"

He was getting more excited as he went along. Why should she say any of these things? He had pried upon her. He had spoilt her pleasure, and broken up her happiness; and beside——

"But for Heaven's sake say something!" he burst out.

"How rude you are!"

"Very likely. I don't know. I did not come here to see you drink tea and eat toast. I did not expect to find you silent."

"You would not speak to me yesterday."

"I had nothing to say. You ought to have much; and your reply to me should require no consideration. Tell me, now, Lucy, that you are sorry for your share in this wretched business, and I will take you about with me among these people and laugh at them instead of allowing them to laugh at—at—us."

Laugh at them! She, the idol of them all, to be "taken about" among them, and by a man who was a scarecrow—a man whose name by this time was upon every one's lips as a sort of brawler.

"I don't want to be taken about, and, though I have done what you seem to think is very dreadful, it is your own fault. You leave me, you neglect me, you don't try to understand me, and are surprised if other men admire me more than you do. At any rate, I have not made a show of myself as you have. Are you not sorry for your share?" She had made him angry at last.

"Yes, I am; I am sorry I did not cut his face in ribbons with my whip, instead of hitting with my hand, as if he were a gentleman."

"Jim, you are a perfect brute."

But she had not calculated on raising his anger to such a pitch, and she began to feel sorry she had spoken.

"I think I am," he thundered, bringing his fist down on the table and making the crockery rattle. "I think you are making a brute of me. Listen! I stayed awake last night trying to make up my mind to forgive you. I felt I could, if I had anything—anything to look forward to in the future. What is the good of success to me now! I am promoted. I am ordered home."

"Are you? Where to? Oh, I don't want to go home."

"You must, whether you like it or not; and I can remember the time when you did not want to come to India. I did my best to give you your wish then; you must comply with mine this time. We are going to a very small station—right out of the world, where you will be perfectly quiet. Don't look disappointed

like that; it is the best thing that could happen to you. You have a scandal to live down."

"But, Jim, I did not create it."

"Did you not? Well, I did, if you like; but all I have to say is, that for my part, if the same thing were to happen to-morrow, I would do the same again—and more. But it has been enough. We shall not see his damned handsome face again—nor will any one else for some time to come, I fancy. In a few weeks we shall be quit of the whole country; and I thought—I did think that I should be able to win back your old love for me when we were quite alone together. But I doubt now if you ever did love me. I suppose it would only be adding to my—my usual good luck to inquire—but did you?"

"I don't know—I don't think so. Do not look at me like that. You have often behaved so badly to me; we never had an idea in common—and, Jim, you

know you never did appreciate me."

"No, I did not. I do now, though. I know now that it is perfectly useless to appeal to your heart or your sense—you have none of either. But listen to me, Lucy! Before I die I will, at least, command your respect."

She began to cry a little. Would he never go He frightened her terribly.

"And when you know more," he went on, "you will have no occasion to be ashamed of your husband."

"But that is just it. How can I ever look Mrs. Lovejoy in the face again? How can I go out? How can I live cooped up in a miserable little hole at home?"

"That will do," he said passionately, rising to his feet and standing over her. "I have heard enough. Before I married you I told you that if you felt you did not love me, I would leave you then and there. You chose to marry me. I have had misfortunes since: they were none of my own making, but you throw them in my teeth. I cannot make you love me, you say. I doubt if it is your nature to love any one—even your child. There was a time when this thought would have well-nigh killed me. I am harder now; I have seen more of the world. And there was a time when your tears would have melted me: they are freezing my very heart up now—they are not shed for me, or for the wrong you have done me—they are shed for yourself."

Lucy buried her face in the sofa-cushions and turned her back upon him; but she left off crying.

"And perhaps," he continued, "I care more now for my own honour than I do for your love. That I cannot force; but I can—and I will—make you do your duty. I have seen plenty of horrors since I've been away—but nothing so horrible as my own home, now that I have come back. Look at these bills! If you had expressed one single word of regret I would not have shown them to you. Look at them, I say. Do you want to ruin me? They are yours, sent to me to settle. There are more of them, probably, and how am I to pay them? I shall know all that by to-morrow. But what do I know now? When I take you home with me, I shall take you with the knowledge that you are not to be trusted in anything—that you have deceived me over and over again, and are not sorry."

The torrent of words ceased, and so silently did he stand there beside her, biting his lip and twisting up the papers in his hands, that, after a long pause, Lucy turned her head, but instantly buried it in the cushions again and shrank up closer to the wall.

"No, I am not gone yet," he said in a calm low voice, bereft of every semblance of its former ferocity. "I am waiting still."

Again there was a long pause, and again it was he that broke it: "Very well, then; I am going now. I am going to the club—I shall lunch there. I will walk about this smiling Hell" (he spoke quite calmly) "and meet people. I shall make a point of meeting them and of speaking to them. I am not afraid; I have done nothing to be asha——"

He stopped very suddenly. There was an awkward choke in his voice; he would just wait until it was gone and he could speak clearly again. It took a long time to go. Once he made a half movement toward the sofa, but checked it, and, after passing his hand quickly across his face, for the last time broke the silence.

"Then, for the present, good-bye; and may God forgive you all the misery you have caused."

Even at the door he turned and looked back; but she had not moved.

And so, at last, they parted.

The pony was soon saddled, and Vraille led him up the hill to the Mall, where he mounted and rode off. He understood, as he paid numerous calls in the Bazaar, why the tailor had been so anxious to send in his account to himself instead of to Lucy. His eyes ached

and his brain throbbed; he could scarcely read the figures that were put before him; but he understood that they were large enough to necessitate an expensive telegram to Uncle Ben. He named a round sum; but, large as that sum was, he felt he would have given a far larger, did he possess it, to sit down and rest.

"I am nearly beat," he said as he held on to the pummel of the saddle while his pony climbed the hill to the club. I can understand what old Dare felt like that night. But a good luncheon and a bottle of champagne will pull me together."

He was right. In an hour he was so jocular and merry, so communicative and sociable, that his friends, who had at first seemed rather to avoid him, gathered round him, listened to his jokes, and laughed. There was not a sad face among them; they congratulated him on his good luck up at the front; they even made flattering remarks about distinguished service and brevet rank; they discussed things military from many points of view—but they one and all avoided social topics.

He spent his afternoon in this idle, gossiping way, and returned home in time for dinner. But he might as well have spared himself the trouble of returning at all—and additional trouble meant additional fatigue. One place only was laid on the dinner-table, one chair only drawn up to it, one person only was expected by the dignified khansamah. Lucy had left word that she was spending the evening with Mrs. Palmira.

She was avoiding him still. Well, it mattered little

now. Mrs. Palmira, with all her love of society, was a shrewd woman, and one not likely to run the risk of having her own reputation cast into the shade of any cloud that might overshadow that of even a dear friend. Lucy was in safe hands, and, on the whole, it was as well that it should be as it was. But a long evening was before him yet. In the dining-room there was that one plate, in the drawing-room those numerous smiling photographs; anything was better than solitude. He had a suit of dress-clothes somewhere, he would dine at the club.

There was a burlesque at the theatre that night, and after dinner the club smoking-room was rather deserted. He knew that Mrs. Palmira would not take Lucy, but he said that he did not care for burlesques, and had not engaged a seat. A rubber of whist engaged his attention until his third revoke, when his partner remarked that he had much better go to bed, as he was looking like death.

He took his partner's advice, but he had difficulty in taking it; the road was long, the night pitch dark, the lantern, bobbing up and down in the syce's hand, of very little use, the effort of keeping himself in the saddle almost beyond his strength.

He could hear her come in just as well from his own room as from the drawing-room, and in his own room he could lie down. He lay back upon his bed while his bearer drew off his boots—that was a relief. Help? No, he wanted no help, the bearer could go. He could not be bothered to undress—beside, he was a watcher; he was waiting up for some one. Oh, how his bones ached, and his head throbbed! How utterly,

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utterly done up he felt that was not to be wondered at . . . no, not to be wondered at, considering all things the pillow was cool and soft the sensation of lying down pleasant . . . delicious it was a pity he was obliged to keep awake the night was so still the house so

He fell into a deep, deep sleep. Worn out in mind and body, he lay like the log he had so often imagined himself to be, and slept on and on without a movement—on and on, right through the night—on, far on into the next day. And no one cared, or dared, to wake him; it was not worth while.

In the morning the khansamah's familiar words of greeting were missing. But the one chair was there, the one place laid, and beside it another pile of letters.

It was while he sat with one of them open in his hand, looking straight before him, with a blank expression of utter helplessness in his face, that Judith peeped into the room. He did not see her, he did not move, and she crept away. In half an hour's time she came again; he had moved only to rest his elbow on the table and his head in his hand, and this time she stole into the room.

"Master," she said, "is there anything I can do?" He looked up.

"I drove her from the house—I—I! I thought she was with Mrs. Palmira—I did indeed. But you know more than I, perhaps, and you may as well know as much. Read—read what she says."

But he did not wait for her to read.

"All along the road home, Judith—all the time I've

been here—even yesterday—people talked to me of nothing but honour, honour, honour!"—and he laughed—a loud, ringing laugh; but it was less pleasant to hear than the cry with which he killed the Afghan.

It was the death-knell of his love.

END OF VOL. I.

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